

Dr. Loh worried about long-term impact of Ford's decision to not mandate vaccines for hospital workers

By Rob Paul

On the heels of Premier Doug Ford refusing to mandate vaccination for hospital workers, Peel's Medical Officer of Health Dr. Lawrence Loh has been critical of the choice.

Despite the worry that mandating the vaccine could lead to hospital shortages, Loh stated in a press conference that this decision will have a more serious long-term impact.

"I know that staffing shortages are a challenge and I know that our hospitals partners are working diligently to clear the backlogs but we also know that outbreaks and hospitals disrupt health-care services significantly," he said. "The reality is that [if you are unvaccinated] you may come in contact with an infectious disease and potentially spread it to an individual who is unable to mount a strong immune response or create an outbreak that essentially shuts down part of the hospital. So, I mean, it's basically pay now or pay later."

Loh is hopeful that hospital workers who are unvaccinated will make the smart decision to keep themselves and others safe as Peel works towards the goal of 90 per cent vaccination coverage.

"It is unfortunate, though I am heartened that many hospitals are actually continuing forward and implementing these vaccine mandates," he said. "It is a patient safety issue, and you know a good friend of mine actually came up with an analogy recently; he said if you join the army, you expect that you might be caught in the line of fire and might be caught having to go into battle. But if you work in a hospital, you might expect that you will have to protect yourself from an infectious disease."

Currently in Peel, 1,320,922 individuals have at least one dose of the vaccine while 1,198,831 are double vaccinated and 10,734 residents have received a third dose with 2,530,487 total doses being administered.

As of last week, third dose vaccination eligibility has opened up to those age 70 and over, healthcare workers and designated essential care workers in congregate settings, individuals who received two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine or one dose of the Janssen vaccine, and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis adults and their non-Indigenous household members. The province is expected to expand eligibility for a third dose again in January.

With the goal of 90 per cent vaccine coverage, Peel continues to see a rise with 89.1 per cent of all adults (18+) having at least one dose and 85 per cent with two. The numbers are similar when looking at everyone eligible for the vaccine (12+) with 89 per cent with at least one dose and 84.8 per cent with two.

It is expected that approval for a COVID vaccine for children ages five to 11 will be coming soon. Dr. Loh says one approved his team is ready to implement a vaccine. Currently Peel is dealing with six active COVID outbreaks in schools, including one in Caledon at St. John Paul II Catholic Elementary School.

With those under 12 ineligible, the total vaccine coverage in Peel is slightly lower with 77.6 per cent of all residents having at least one dose and 73.9 per cent with two.

As for COVID cases in the Region, Peel has had 283 new cases over this past week, 69 more new cases than the previous week, to bring the total to 118,418. There were also two new deaths to bring the total to 1,029.

In Caledon, there were 20 new cases of COVID this week; last week there were just seven new cases, bringing the Town's total to 4,927. Fatalities remain unchanged at 22.

To book a vaccine in the Region of Peel, visit <https://www.peelregion.ca/coronavirus/vaccine/book-appointment/>.

To download or print a copy of your proof of vaccination, visit covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccine-booking-support#proof-of-vaccination. To learn more about the official QR code system Ontario has implemented and to access yours, visit covid-19.ontario.ca/get-proof/.