

Older adults, hotspots will be focus of vaccine rollout's second phase

By Brock Weir

Older adults and individuals living in COVID-19 hotspots will be the focus of Phase 2 of Ontario's vaccine rollout.

The Province detailed the second phase of the program on Friday as more vaccines rolled in, leading to a revised timeline on what was previously presented.

Phase 2 is expected to begin next month "with a focus on vaccinating populations based on age and risk," said the Province.

This approach, they said, is "designed to save lives, protect those at risk due to serious illness and to stop the virus from spreading."

"Due to the incredible work of an army of people we have a solid vaccine distribution plan and we are ready to get needles into arms as soon as the doses arrive," said Premier Doug Ford in a statement. "This is a true Team Ontario effort and we are mobilizing our greatest asset - the people of Ontario. Vaccines will be administered in hospital clinics, primary care settings, mass vaccination sites, mobile clinics and pharmacies across the Province by dedicated, caring and compassionate frontline health care heroes."

Phase 2 will centre on older adults between the ages of 60 and 79, along with individuals with specific health conditions and some primary caregivers. People who live and work in congregate settings and some primary caregivers will also be eligible, as will people who live in "hot spots" with high rates of death, hospitalizations and transmissions. Certain workers who cannot work from home will also make the cut for Phase 2.

"Thanks to the hard work of our healthcare partners and frontline workers, Ontario's vaccine rollout is making a positive difference and helping to save the lives of some of our most vulnerable," said Health Minister Christine Elliott. "We continue to ramp up capacity and are committed to administering as many doses as quickly as possible to every Ontarian who wants a vaccine."

As of midday Friday, the Province said 820,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines had been administered, with 269,000 individuals now fully immunized. More than 95 per cent of long-term care residents are also fully immunized and work continues with these living settings to vaccinate staff and essential caregivers.

"The fight against COVID-19 continues to be our government's top priority," said Solicitor General Sylvia Jones. "With the approval of the AstraZeneca vaccine, and now the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, and with increased supplies coming into the Province, this gives us renewed focus to get even more Ontarians vaccinated sooner. We have made tremendous progress and ask that Ontarians continue to stay the course to protect themselves and keep their families, friends and communities safe."

Phase 3 will be rolled out when vaccines are available for every Ontarian who wants to be immunized, the Province noted.

This Monday, March 15, the Province will launch an online booking system and a Provincial customer service desk to answer questions and support appointment bookings at mass immunization clinics after public health units in Simcoe-Muskoka and York Region, among others, began the process of distributing appointments based on their own platforms.

Once this new Ontario-wide platform is launched, it is anticipated that the majority of the Province's public health units will migrate over to this system.

"As supply increases, Ontarians will be able to get vaccinated with the three Health Canada approved vaccines in several new settings," said the Province. "In addition to hospitals, mobile clinics and mass vaccination clinics, the province is working with the pharmacy sector and with primary care professionals to offer vaccinations in primary care settings and community locations in collaboration with public health units. A pilot for pharmacy vaccine administration is planned for mid-March in select regions,

including Toronto, Windsor and the Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington region, followed by specific primary care pilots in collaboration with public health units.?