

Peel continues to aim for 75% vaccination rate as businesses prepare to re-open Friday

By Rob Paul

As Ontario approaches Step One of its re-opening on June 11, Peel Region is continuing to deal with concerns surrounding the rising Delta variant.

To deal with the variant growing in Peel, the Region opened up second-dose booking early to residents 70 years of age and older, and to those who received the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine on or before April 18.

Appointments for those eligible became available on June 7 through Ontario's vaccine booking system (covid-19.ontario.ca/book-vaccine) or by calling 1-833-943-3900. First doses for anyone 12 and older who has not already booked are available this weekend at Peel clinics. Some pharmacies and primary care providers in the region may offer eligible residents access to their second dose this weekend if supply allows.

According to projections from the Ontario Science Table, the Delta variant (B.1617) will replace B.117 as the dominant strain of COVID-19 in Peel in under four weeks. In addition to vaccination, adhering to safe public health practices remains a priority for Peel in reducing transmission of all variants of COVID-19.

"The Peel community has worked too hard to lose what we have regained to yet another variant," said Peel's Associate Medical Officer of Health Dr. Monica Hau. "We need to move quickly to provide second doses to residents to stay ahead of the new Delta variant and prevent a fourth wave in Peel, which ultimately helps prevent a fourth wave across Ontario. Two doses of vaccine are our best defence and significantly increase protection from B.1617."

In total, the Region has seen 110,297 cases of COVID-19 and 771 deaths?up 854 cases and six deaths since last week. Currently, 59.6 per cent of cases in Peel are in Brampton with 36.1 per cent in Mississauga and four per cent in Caledon.

Caledon continues to see its weekly case count decrease and have seen zero additional deaths since mid-May while sitting at 4,415 total cases and 18 deaths?31 more cases since last week.

On top of opening second booking eligibility to more residents, Peel has revised the Section 22 Order for workplace closures that is currently in place. The updates include explicit addition of eye protection as part of personal protective equipment requirements where physical distancing cannot be maintained at all times and revised isolation and testing requirements for asymptomatic workers to state that public health will provide specific direction during investigations.

Peel has experienced more than 550 workplace outbreaks since March 1, 2020, and with the Delta variant increasing risk, the Region wanted to implement additional safety measures for operating businesses.

After surpassing a million vaccine doses administered last week, Peel is now up to 1,212,884 doses administered in total with 99,664 coming in the last seven-day cycle (May 31 to June 7). Of the total doses, 1,124,036 are first doses with 88,848 residents having completed their vaccinations.

As Peel continues to strive to cross the threshold of 75 per cent of residents being vaccinated that Dr. Lawrence Loh, Peel's Medical Officer of Health, is aiming for, the Region is at 62.4 per cent of all residents being vaccinated with 73.8 per cent of adults being vaccinated.

With the Region's efforts to reach vaccine milestones, Peel established the Hockey Hub vaccination centre at the CAA Centre in Brampton. Peel partnered with Bruce Power and a coalition of organizations, unions, and businesses to establish and support the

Hockey Hub, which is now open to the public.

The facility is operated by Peel Public Health and is providing the region the capacity for thousands of daily vaccines in an area of the province that was particularly hard hit by the pandemic.

"We are thankful to all of the partners who have come together to make the CAA Centre clinic a reality and to the Province for continued support to vaccinate all of Peel, as we push towards widespread two-dose coverage," said Dr. Loh. "Every vaccination administered is an essential action in combatting COVID-19."

Last week, Ontario Premier Doug Ford visited the facility and thanked Peel, the partnering organizations, and the hundreds of volunteers for the effort in getting the Hockey Hub up and running.

"I want to thank our public health units, hospital partners, and frontline health care workers for their leadership throughout this pandemic, as well as organizations like Bruce Power and their many partners, who have committed to supporting Ontarians through this vaccination effort," said Ford. "These organizations coming together with public health to establish this hub is a demonstration of the true Ontario spirit."

On Monday, Ford moved the initial re-opening of the province up three days to Friday, June, 11 due to the province-wide vaccination rate and continuing improvements in key health sectors.

"Thanks to the ongoing success of Team Ontario's vaccine rollout and the ongoing improvements in public health trends, we are able to enter step one of the Roadmap and begin to safely and cautiously lift restrictions," Ford said. "The only reason we're able to do so is because of the enormous sacrifices made by individuals, families and communities across Ontario. As we begin to enjoy the benefits of the first step in our roadmap like meeting friends on a patio or visiting your favourite local store, please do so safely by continuing to follow all public health guidelines."

For Step One of the re-opening, Ontario needed to have 60 per cent of adults with at least one dose of the vaccine for two weeks or longer and as of June 6, 72 per cent of adults in the province had received a dose?over 10 million doses have now been administered in Ontario.

As part of the Step One re-open, Ontario will now allow: outdoor social gatherings of up to 10 people; outdoor religious services (including weddings) capped at the number of people that can maintain a physical distance of two metres; non-essential retail is permitted at 15 per cent capacity with no restrictions on goods that can be sold; essential and other select retail is permitted at 25 per cent capacity; outdoor dining with up to four people per table, with exceptions for larger households; outdoor fitness classes, outdoor groups in personal training and outdoor individual/team sport training is to be permitted with up to 10 people; overnight camping at campgrounds and campsites.

The province will have to remain in Step One of the re-open for at least 21 days to evaluate the situation. If after 21 days the province has 70 per cent of adults with one dose and 20 per cent with two and sees improvement in key areas, it will move into Step Two.

"While we have reached the point where we can safely move into Step One, now is not the time to get complacent," said Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health. "We must all remain vigilant, as the fight against COVID-19 is not over. By continuing to follow public health advice and measures we can continue to reduce transmission, safeguard health system capacity and save lives."

For more information on vaccine eligibility and booking a vaccine appointment in Peel visit peelregion.ca/coronavirus/vaccine/book-appointment/default.asp.