

Workplace vaccination clinics launch as Peel battles third wave

By **ROB PAUL**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

As part of Peel Region's efforts to mass vaccinate residents, workplace clinics began on April 27 with two at Maple Lodge Farms in Brampton and Mississauga opening up.

On April 28, two more pop-up clinics opened at Maple Leaf Foods in Brampton and Mississauga with plans for two more to open May 5 at Amazon locations in Brampton and Bolton.

The goal of these pop-up clinics is to administer 7,000 doses in the first three weeks to employees of the workplaces and is led by both Peel Public Health and the province becoming the first public-private vaccination partnerships in the province.

Workplace vaccination clinics represent an expansion of our mobile offerings here in Peel, and supply now permits us to launch this offering in support of our overall mass vaccination efforts," said Peel's Medical Officer of Health Dr. Lawrence Loh. "By reaching out directly to residents and workplaces in hotspots, we can continue to address transmission in our community and quickly protect even more residents in our community, particularly those who cannot work from home."

Loh announced last week an update under the Section 22 Order on workplaces that will force closures of businesses that see five or more cases of COVID-19 in the previous 14 days where the virus could have reasonably been acquired at work or no obvious source of infection has been identified outside of the workplace.

Under the order, two Amazon facilities in Brampton and Bolton were forced to partially close on April 24 due to COVID-19 cases. There have been 13 workplaces identified thus far that been impacted by Section 22 closures.

Peel is on the cusp of hitting the milestone of 500,000 doses administered in the region and Peel's Community Mass Vaccination Plan is expanding to reach more residents in hot spots. As such, workplaces are being prioritized.

Workplaces in Peel have seen 426 COVID-19 outbreaks and without paid sick leave as an option at this point, some workers have had to enter the workplace regardless of their health.

The vaccination of adults working in hot spot communities in select workplaces is to help lessen the impact of COVID spreading in the workplace.

The province and Peel Region worked with industry partners to select Amazon, Maple Leaf Foods, and Maple Lodge Farms for the initial run of workplace clinics in Peel. The workplaces will then operate local community clinics in partnership with the Region of Peel and community organizations.

The criteria for selecting workplaces includes hot spot location, outbreak data, and willingness of the employer to operate and fund on-site clinics for their employees and a separate clinic for the community.

"We are working in collaboration with over 150 organizations and over 20 community group working tables to roll out the Mass Vaccination Program and Hot Spot strategy within workplace and community sites," said Loh. "These hot spot workplace and community pop-up clinics are a welcome addition to the variety of ways that we are delivering vaccines in arms. We thank the province for their partnership and support and appreciate the willingness of these leading employers to partner with community agencies to support Peel's hot spot strategy under the direction of public health."

Added Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones: "Our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is supporting these important local employers in their efforts to welcome on-site vaccination clinics that will protect their employees and the community. Ontario is focused on getting vaccines to those most at risk and we are grateful for the partnership of these employers and Peel Public Health in helping make vaccines more accessible."

Workplace vaccinations are new to Peel Region, but they aren't new to fighting the pandemic.

In the U.S., multiple companies have invested in their employees by setting up on-site vaccination clinics because they're in industries where employees aren't able to work from home.

Tyson Foods has run over 80 on-site vaccination events at its plant with over a third of its 100,000 domestic employees already being vaccinated.

"We see offering the vaccine to our team members as another step in our efforts to help fight the virus, protect our team members and end the pandemic," said Tyson Chief Medical Officer Dr. Claudia Coplein.

While Amazon centres in Peel have plans to begin their on-site vaccinations, other Amazon locations in the U.S. have already begun this process.

"In partnership with local government and public health officials, we are beginning to host on-site vaccination events administered by licensed health care providers at an initial set of Amazon operations buildings in the United States," Amazon said in a statement in March. "We're starting at some fulfillment centers in Missouri, Nevada, and Kansas, but will expand the program across the country as more vaccines become available to front-line employees in other states."

"This is an important initiative not only for the health and safety of Amazon employees, but for the communities where our teams live and work. Our events will protect Amazon employees while also helping ease the burden on community-run vaccination clinics."

In March, Foster Farms—an American poultry company—partnered with Save Mart Pharmacy to vaccinate more essential workers on-site.

"Foster Farms is focusing its resources to ensure that the vaccination program is successfully carried out with a high level of employee participation. We are committed to expanding vaccinations as soon as greater supply becomes available," said Foster Farms Vice President of Communications Ira Bill. "We owe it to the people that selflessly keep food on all of our tables to ensure they are vaccinated as rapidly as possible."

Many large facilities that have workers who need to physically be there for operations to continue have pushed towards these on-site vaccination clinics to stop COVID outbreaks that lead to closures.

The CDC has long said that workplaces who are capable of administering the vaccine should do so if they have essential workers and because it can help build confidence in employees.

"By providing information about COVID-19 vaccination and establishing supportive policies and practices, employers can help increase vaccine uptake among essential workers," the CDC stated. "Although COVID-19 vaccine supply is currently limited, it's not too early to share clear, complete, and accurate messages, promote confidence in the decision to get vaccinated, and engage your employees in plans to address potential barriers to vaccination. Strong confidence in the vaccines within your workplace leads to more people getting vaccinated, which leads to fewer COVID-19 illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths."