



NEWS

Residents urged to follow health guidelines as vaccine still months away

Interim medical officer of health Dr. Ian Gemmill says immunization for the general public could be done quickly, but not likely to happen until the summer

By [Catherine Whitnall](#) Kawartha Lakes This Week

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Vaccines to fight the COVID-19 pandemic are being distributed across Ontario, but the local health unit notes it will still be months before the general public gets their shots.

“We know that this coronavirus will never completely go away. . . but this is what is going to change things for everybody,” stated Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge

District Health Unit interim medical officer of health Dr. Ian Gemmill who cannot emphasize enough the importance of adhering to public health and provincial guidelines.

“I think the reason why we are still in this mess is because the message still hasn’t sunk in for some people,” said Gemmill referencing those engaged in non-essential travel. “People need to keep in mind that we’re all only two or three degrees of separation from an individual who has a loved one, someone in a long-term care home, who, if they become infected, could very well die.”

When asked, Gemmill said the local health unit has been in constant contact with the province but does not know when the area will receive the vaccine. Even when it is available, he adds, it will depend on supply and distributed in phases, with those areas hit hardest by the pandemic prioritized.

“We don’t have the same intensity as other areas, so our jobs right now are to be prepared for when it becomes available to reduce delays,” said Gemmill, adding the vaccine will be marshalled through local hospitals with public health providing guidance.

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Most current data from the Ministry shows the local area has a 3.3 per cent cumulative rate of cases versus the provincial total of 14 per cent; Toronto sits at 21 per cent.

Granted, Gemmill points out that, if even just 70 per cent of people get immunized, it will have a huge impact moving forward.

That said, those at highest risk, such as long-term care residents and staff, front line healthcare workers and home health care clients and workers will be vaccinated first, followed by essential workers, then the general public. All this is expected to take until the summer, noted Gemmill.

Gemmill anticipates vaccinating the HKPR’s roughly 200,000 residents could

potentially be completed in about four weeks or even quicker, given the fact there are other vaccines in the works that only require one dose and don't require deep cold storage.

"It's all about getting ramped up and getting the machine going," said Gemmill. "Once we get started, we know from previous vaccination clinics that we can put through a good number of people on a daily basis."

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