



NEWS

'We're in the queue': First local batch of COVID-19 vaccines anticipated in early February

Medical officer of health talks vaccine rollout; LTC priorities in Phase 1, Phase 2 into spring, summer

By [Sarah Hyatt](#) Northumberland News

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The first round of COVID-19 vaccines will hopefully reach local communities in early February.

And while there's no firm date as of yet – and timelines are subject to change based on vaccine availability – Dr. Ian Gemmill, the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit's acting medical officer of health, has confirmed public health

officials have been “notified to be on alert for early February.” In other words, currently, this is when Phase 1 of vaccine distribution is slotted to reach the HKPR region, which includes the Northumberland and Kawartha areas.

“We’re in the queue – we will be getting vaccines,” said Gemmill, during the health unit’s first-ever virtual information session with media Wednesday, Jan. 13, where he provided an update on the pandemic at the local level, including vaccination distribution.

Under Phase 1, the priority populations include those in long-term care facilities; their staff, residents and their essential caregivers, other health-care workers, and people receiving chronic home care, and the like.

“The long-term care homes are No. 1 – we want to get people there protected, the residents, the staff and essential caregivers, who go into provide assistance with their friends and loved ones there,” said Gemmill, while also noting the recent rising cases and recent deaths within the region. “It is, I think, the one huge, bright light that we have – it is going to be the magic bullet, if we can get the vaccine into arms before people get sick with the virus.”

Since Jan. 1, Gemmill was quick to note, almost 40 per cent of Ontario’s LTC facilities have had active COVID-19 outbreaks; additionally, provincial modelling data also indicates more LTC deaths are anticipated during the second COVID-19 wave versus wave one.

“...LTC homes are the priority, and when we get the vaccine for our area, we will leave no stone unturned to get vaccines in arms in LTC first, and then others as fast as we possibly can,” he said.

Currently, two vaccines are licensed in Canada; they include the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. Vaccine rollout just started, with Ontario focusing on LTC facilities in the hardest hit areas.

The main issue currently is the supply of the vaccine, which at the moment, is quite limited, explained Gemmill. But, he said, the hope is to start Phase 1 in HKPR in early February, and the health unit is doing everything in its power to facilitate this, he promised, though at the same time warned the timeline could easily change based on vaccine availability.

Public health officials are in the process of planning for distribution, “dusting off mass immunization plans,” and are working with several community partners, including those in the health and municipal sectors, to ensure HKPR is ready, not only for Phase 1, but for later vaccine phases, stressed Gemmill.

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All of the specifics for distribution at the local level are “still to be determined.” Venues, drive-thru options, and a number of possibilities are being looked at, Gemmill did note.

The vaccinations have “stringent freezer requirements,” which means in this area, it’s possible some may have to be transferred by other nearby health facilities, once earmarked for HKPR, it was explained.

Those discussions with the province surrounding getting the vaccine here, as well as which LTC facilities will be done first, and for all to get the vaccine as soon as possible, are ongoing, Gemmill said.

After this, Phase 2 will happen, which includes additional essential workers, other older adults, and then later, all who want to be vaccinated.

Phase 2 is expected to start into the spring, possibly through the summer and so on, but again, will be determined by vaccine availability, said Gemmill.

“Our commitment is to get vaccines into arms as fast as we can, once we have access to it.”

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