

“It’s based on our previous experience of mass immunization, and the experience of others who have been running mass immunization in high-instance areas, who have already worked with coronavirus,” he said.

The program includes a plan for vaccine distribution to long-term care homes and high-risk retirement homes — the health unit’s priority when they receive the vaccine supply expected in early February. Healthcare workers will also be offered the vaccine as it becomes available.

“The next in line after long-term care homes, healthcare workers, and home-care patients will be other essential workers,” explained Dr. Gemmill. “People who have to work to keep our society going during this pandemic.”

The health unit will then distribute the vaccine to at-risk older adults, followed by all older adults, followed by the general population.

While Dr. Gemmill said he hopes to begin the HKPR area’s first phase of vaccine distribution in early February, this is subject to change as supplies change.

Retired general Rick Hillier, chair of Ontario’s vaccine distribution task force, announced yesterday there is a shortage of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine due to a production issue in Belgium, and there will be no shipments to Canada next week.

Currently, two vaccines have been approved for use in Canada: the Pfizer vaccine and the Moderna vaccine. Dr. Gemmill said the Moderna vaccine is “probable for this area given the shortage of the Pfizer.”

“It’s too bad that we’re having these supply issues,” said Dr. Gemmill, “but what I’m asking people is to be patient because the commitment, I know, from all of our government, is that the vaccine will be in arms as quickly as we can get the vaccine in place. We are going to make sure that happens in this area.”

“We’ve been told that by March, we won’t have to be worrying about the supply,” he added.

In the meantime, Dr. Gemmill assured the HKPR Health Unit is prepared to distribute the vaccine as soon as supply becomes available.

“We have a plan in place, and once the vaccine is ready to go, we are ready to go.”

Dr. Gemmill said the key principles in their completed immunization plan are efficiency, “once we get the vaccine to get it into arms as fast as possible,” and accessibility, “which means people don’t have to drive for hours to get their dose of vaccine.”

“Then we are also, of course, being guided by, and must adhere to, the priority list given by local direction,” he added. “But within that, we will be looking at local risk. If we don’t have enough vaccine for all the long-term care homes, we will be looking at the ones at the highest risk first.”