



No vaccine available until February, says local health unit

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The Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit is primed and ready for a massive COVID-19 vaccination program across their catchment area, but one crucial element is missing: vaccine.

Dr. Ian Gemmill, HKPR's medical officer of health, briefed the press on the current pandemic situation during a conference call

on Jan. 20 and sketched out roughly what the next few months will look like locally.

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Restrictions cannot be in place for ever.”

“HKPR has a plan in place for a mass immunization for coronavirus based around what has already been learned in Ottawa and Toronto,” he said, cities where the process has already begun. “Local doctors have offered to help. We are speaking to municipalities about what facilities they can provide for clinics. We are talking to the police about how clinics can be run safely. The speed in which this gets done will depend exclusively on the supply of the vaccine available.”

HKPR plans to vaccinate employees and residents of long term care homes first, followed by health care workers and people on home care, other essential workers, older adults at risk, all other older adults and then the general public at large.

Gemmill also updated those on the call about the current epidemiology regarding COVID-19 in HKPR.

“In the last two weeks there have been 150 cases reported in our area,” Gemmill began, “That is roughly 10-15 cases a day. Monday of this week we only had four, and Tuesday only six. The lockdown is helping as is the stay at home order.”

Contact tracing identified 40 per cent of the patients caught the illness through household contact, another 30 per cent at work, on public transportation or at social gatherings, and 20 per cent caught it via community transmission where they were unaware and unprotected.

Half of the cases in the last two weeks are from Northumberland County, 40 per cent are located in Kawartha Lakes and six per cent are from Haliburton, Gemmill shared. “The number one age for infection are individuals between 50-59 followed very closely by those between 20-29.”

“There is a shortage of the Pfizer vaccine, and currently no shipments are expected to Canada the week of Jan. 25,” Gemmill said. “I expect when needles start to go into arms here we will likely be using the Moderna-manufactured vaccine. There are two more vaccines being looked at by Health Canada, but as of yet they have not been approved.”

Gemmill recognizes the current frustration at vaccine shortages.

“A month ago we couldn’t do anything. Now we have a vaccine. We need to be patient. We expect vaccine will become available in early February with supply widely available by March of 2021.”

“The vaccine is essential, safe and effective,” Gemmill continued. “We are waiting with baited breath. We can stop diseases with vaccines. We have all but eradicated smallpox and polio via vaccine. This is our only hope to get back to normal.

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With schools returning to in-person learning on Jan. 25, Gemmill said there is very little documented illness in children. “There appears to be little transmission in schools. The cases discovered at school have come from the outside.”

“Locally there are 600-700 COVID tests being done daily. We are reporting a 1.5 per cent positivity rate which is low when compared to other areas around the province,” Gemmill said.

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Kirk is a retired high school history teacher and coach who has had a lifelong interest in politics at all levels. Since retiring, Kirk has spent the last three years doing freelance writing of all kinds for various platforms. Kirk can often be found sitting in the press

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