

Northumberland-Kawartha medical officer of health talks process, plans for COVID-19 vaccines for ages 5 to 11

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News

FDA application in U.S. means ‘we’re one step closer,’ says health unit’s top doctor

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When — and still if at this time — COVID-19 vaccines are approved for ages five to 11, the Northumberland, Kawartha and Haliburton areas will be ready to support vaccination rollout on a larger scale again, with planning and ongoing discussions already underway.

Following such approvals for the Pfizer vaccine — which may not be that far off now — it’s likely the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit area may return to operating at least some mass immunization clinics, Dr. Natalie Bocking,

the local medical officer of health, recently confirmed.

During her latest COVID-19 regional briefing, Bocking spoke about Pfizer's recent application to the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the five to 11 age group.

"So they did put in their application to the FDA in the United States. What does this mean for Canada, and what does it mean for HKPR? It means we're one step closer," explained Bocking.

"We're still a little (bit) away, but I think still hopeful that we will see a vaccine approved for children and youth under the age of 12 before the end of this calendar year — (and) once the vaccine receives approval in the United States, it will likely be submitted also for approval to Health Canada."

Health Canada will then review all the safety and efficacy data associated with the trials for the Pfizer vaccine and this age group, explained Bocking.

"Once that approval is completed, then the National Advisory Committee on Immunization will make policy directions — or statements — which will then be directed towards the provinces and the provinces will issue their own policy directions for actual implementation and rollout in Ontario."

In other words, there are still "a few steps" to go in between. But, at this point, public health is well-experienced in terms of what these processes look like and can quickly adapt as needed when it comes to rollout, noted Bocking.

"We are having ongoing conversations with our health-sector partners related to strategies for rollout of vaccines for five- to 11-year-olds, (for) if and when we do have approval for rollout of the vaccine," said Bocking, adding this will likely translate to public health and area partners taking on "multiple strategies" and options for accessing doses.

"We know that not one strategy meets the needs of all individuals or the needs of all families, so you will see a variety of options for accessing vaccine for this age group, which likely will include, again, some form of a mass immunization clinic (made) available throughout different areas in (the) HKPR jurisdiction."

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Once approvals and plans are all firmed up, those details will be shared — and likely closer to the time of rollout. But people can be reassured that there is already planning underway, lots of ongoing discussions, and that HKPR will be in a position to support rollout if and when approvals happen, and following those policy directions, said the health unit's top doctor.

As recently reported in the Toronto Star, the Pfizer vaccine for kids is showing what's been described as "promising" trial results.

Officials here, too, said, jabs for kids could be a reality within months, following initial looks at Pfizer-BioNTech trial results for kids ages five to 11. Results so far,

according to a statement recently put out by the companies, suggest a smaller, child-sized dose is safe, well tolerated and “showed robust neutralizing antibody responses.”

Results in kids under five are anticipated later this year.

Health Canada has also said previously that it expects to have the necessary information it needs to make a decision on approval by end of year.

— *With files from the Toronto Star*