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LOCAL : LIFE

Volunteers needed to assist at vaccination clinics as COVID numbers keep climbing

Impact of Omicron variant stressing health unit's human resources

By **Catherine Whitnall** Reporter

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As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to increase exponentially in the region, many would think the last place they should volunteer is at a vaccination centre.

However, the increase in cases — much of it linked to the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant — monitoring of high-risk contacts and the Dec. 20 change to age eligibility for booster vaccinations has resulted in the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge (HKPR) District Health Unit's human resources being stretched thin.

While volunteers can't administer vaccines, there are plenty of other jobs that need to be done. Volunteers support vaccination clinics by taking on tasks such as greeting and screening clients, line management, distributing masks and hand sanitizer and providing other support to clients waiting for their immunization.

“With the rise of Omicron and the rush to provide more booster doses for eligible residents, the need for volunteers continues to be high, especially when health unit staff are already stretched in their other COVID-19 work. To date, we have had dozens of individuals respond to our call to volunteer, for which we are exceedingly grateful,” said HKPR medical officer of health Dr. Natalie Bocking.

As COVID response efforts continue, the health unit has increased the number of available appointments and expanded some clinics, such as the one operating at the Cobourg Community Centre where an estimated 700 doses are expected to be given daily.

“Volunteers are — and have been throughout the pandemic — essential partners in assisting the health unit to get vaccines into arms at our mass immunization clinics,” said Bocking. “In particular, local volunteers and members of area Rotary Clubs have been very instrumental in helping us. Tens of thousands of vaccines have been administered in 2021, and this is a remarkable achievement that wouldn't have been possible without the dedication and support of countless volunteers, residents and community partners in the region.”

To date (Dec. 28), 84.6 per cent of residents aged five and older have received one dose, while 80.2 per cent have received two, with more than 37,000 booster doses administered during December.

Volunteers continue to be needed at clinics in Cobourg, Fenelon Falls, Lindsay and Minden. Those interested in helping out should be able to wear a mask and face shield during their shift — morning shifts run from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and afternoon from 1:30 to 5 p.m. — have received at least two doses of vaccine and provide proof of vaccination.

For more information on how to register, visit www.hkpr.on.ca/2021/12/16/volunteers-needed-in-covid-19-mass-immunization-clinics/.

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