

COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force

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Groupe d'étude sur la distribution des vaccins contre la COVID-19

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March 12, 2021

We have reached a major milestone - over 1,000,000 doses of vaccines have been administered in Ontario. While we should reflect on how far we have come, we must not stop pushing forward as this is only the beginning of the journey. There are many more vaccinations to administer to reach our goal of ensuring that every eligible Ontarian who wants a vaccine, receives one.

Ontario has reached another key milestone in protecting remote and isolated Indigenous communities against COVID-19, having visited all 31 fly-in northern communities and Moosonee to offer first doses of the vaccine as part of Operation Remote Immunity (ORI).

ORI is led by Ornge and was co-developed in partnership with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) to ensure engagement of Indigenous leadership in how vaccines are offered to their communities.

ORI was officially launched on February 1, 2021 and aims to complete its work by the end of April 2021. The vaccine is being offered to community members 18 years of age or older. As of March 8, 2021, a total of 15,960 doses (12,843 first doses and 3,117 second doses) of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Sioux Lookout and communities in scope for ORI. Administration of second doses has been completed in seven communities and is currently underway in nine more communities this week.

With vaccine supply stabilizing and over two million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine expected from the federal government before the end of March, the province will enter Phase Two of its vaccine rollout. Between April 2021 and July 2021, up to nine million Ontarians will be vaccinated.

During Phase Two, groups that will receive the vaccine include:

- Older adults between 60-79 years of age;
- Individuals with specific health conditions and some primary caregivers;
- People who live and work in congregate settings and some primary caregivers;
- People who live in hot spots with high rates of death, hospitalizations and transmission; and
- Certain workers who cannot work from home.

For more detailed information on the priority groups, please visit:

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/60570/populations-eligible-for-phase-two-covid-19-vaccination>

Starting March 15th, the province will launch an online booking system and a provincial customer service desk to answer questions and support appointment bookings at mass immunization clinics. This will initially support individuals over the age of 80 as part of Phase One, eventually extending to more groups during Phase Two. While some public health units are currently using their own booking systems to vaccinate individuals aged 80 and over, it is anticipated that most public health units will transition to the provincial booking system after it has launched.

With the approval of the AstraZeneca/COVISHEILD and Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines, and increased supplies coming into the province, we will be able to ramp up the number of doses administered daily. As supply increases, Ontarians will be able to get vaccinated in several new settings. In addition to hospitals, mobile clinics and mass vaccination clinics, the province is working with the pharmacy sector and with primary care professionals to offer vaccinations in primary care settings and community locations in collaboration with public health units.

NACI has provided the recommendation to extend the vaccination dose interval up to four months for all Health Canada approved COVID-19 vaccines while maintaining a strong and sustained level of protection from the virus. This news along with the approval of new vaccines will help us to reforecast and maximize the number of people receiving a first dose in a shorter timeframe, pending supply from the federal government. Ontario has accepted and will follow NACI's recommendations starting March 10th, with some limited exceptions.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support and leadership in our efforts.

Sincerely,

General (Ret'd) Rick Hillier
Chair of the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force