



Date: Friday, May 14, 2021

Mr. Dave LeGallais
President
Aurora Seniors Association

Subject: Questions – COVID-19

Dave,

Thank you for your email and for raising these important questions with our office. I understand that the members of the Aurora Seniors Association are looking for more information about COVID-19 vaccinations. I hope that these responses will help bring clarity to these matters.

Since the onset of the pandemic, our government's top priority is protecting the health and well-being of Ontarians, especially our most vulnerable. COVID-19 vaccines are our best defence against the virus, and we remain committed to ensuring all Ontarians who wish to be vaccinated can be as quickly and safely as possible. We strongly encourage all Ontarians to book their appointment to be vaccinated as soon as they are eligible.

1. Are cases in York Region increasing because of variants and do the vaccines protect against them?

RESPONSE:

Ontario, like many other provinces across Canada and jurisdictions around the world, is in the midst of the third wave of the pandemic, driven by COVID-19 variants that are more transmissible and likely to lead to hospitalization. Since York Region started reporting on variant cases in February, the number of variants cases have grown significantly. For example, on February 18, 290 variant cases were identified, as of April 19, there were 9,017 variant cases identified with 3,101 being active. The most recent data, May 13, 15,725 variant cases identified with 1,126 being active.

Health Canada approved vaccines are safe, effective and the best way to protect our seniors, their loved ones and our community. Vaccines are an important tool to help stop the spread of the virus, build immunity in communities across Ontario, and allow us to safely resume normal life.



All Health Canada approved vaccines in Ontario:

- have been determined to be safe and effective at preventing hospitalization and death; and
- are anticipated to be effective against the original strain of the virus and the identified variants.

We strongly encourage everyone to sign up to be vaccinated when it is their turn.

2. Since the time before receiving a booster has been increased to approximately four months, is there concern as to whether immunity from the first vaccine decreases over that time?

RESPONSE:

Getting the first dose substantially reduces the risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death. Recent scientific studies show sustained high levels of protection following the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Getting a shot does not mean instant protection. For first doses, the protection does not occur until 12 to 14 days after getting the shot and the maximum effectiveness can be reached after over 30 days.

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has provided a recommendation to extend the vaccination dose interval up to 16 weeks for the three two-dose vaccines currently approved by Health Canada, while maintaining a strong and sustained level of protection from COVID-19. According to NACI, and in the context of limited supply, an extended interval would allow Canada to provide a first dose of vaccines to 80% of all Canadians 16 years of age and over by the end of June.

This means fewer infections, less symptomatic disease, fewer hospitalizations and ICU admissions, and more lives saved.

The effectiveness of an extended dose interval is continually monitored and assessed, including for the effectiveness against variants of concern. Decisions regarding intervals will be reflective of the strongest medical advice available.

It is important to remember that some people will receive their second dose sooner. Specific populations who are at very high risk of becoming seriously ill or dying, should they become infected with COVID-19, are eligible to receive their second dose earlier than the extended four-month interval.



For more information on the second dose interval in Ontario, please visit:

https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/vaccine/COVID_19_vaccine_dose_intervals.pdf

For more information on NACI's recommendation, please visit the Government of Canada website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/extended-dose-intervals-covid-19-vaccines-early-rollout-population-protection.html>

3. If you have received one vaccine and come in contact with an infected person, can you contract COVID, and if so, will it be less severe? What is the outcome if the second dose of the vaccine had been administered?

RESPONSE:

It is important to remember that all Health Canada approved vaccines in Ontario have been determined to be safe and effective. However, getting a shot does not mean instant protection. For first doses, the protection does not occur until 12 to 14 days after getting the shot and the maximum effectiveness can be reached after over 30 days.

There is still a risk of getting sick and transmitting COVID-19 to others, including people who have not been vaccinated.

Because these variants are more transmissible, it remains extremely important for everyone to follow the public health measures that we know work to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe.

When a large percentage of the population becomes immune to COVID-19, the spread of the virus will slow down or stop. However, until vaccines are widely available and enough people have been fully vaccinated to stop the spread of the virus, it is important that all Ontarians continue to follow the public health and workplace safety measures we know help to limit transmission of the virus and save lives.

4. One of the most often asked questions is whether, after being fully vaccinated, it is safe to see the grandkids! Is it safe to be around family who have not yet received their vaccines?

RESPONSE:



When a large percentage of the population becomes immune to COVID-19, the spread of the virus will slow down or stop. However, until vaccines are widely available and enough people have been fully vaccinated to stop the spread of the virus, it is important that all Ontarians continue to follow the public health and workplace safety measures we know help to limit transmission of the virus and save lives.

Thanks to the collective efforts of Ontarians in following public health and workplace safety measures, the province continues to make considerable progress in the fight to control the third wave of COVID-19. However, despite improvements, key indicators remain high and more time is required before the province can safely lift the Stay-at-Home Order. With the new, more contagious variants continuing to pose significant risks, the Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, has extended the Stay-at-Home Order until at least June 2, 2021 to help stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus, protect hospital capacity and save lives.

5. One of the questions our Association is grappling with is whether to make it mandatory, except for medical exemptions, for our members to be vaccinated before returning to the Centre, once we reopen. Is this recommended or would we be violating the Human Rights Act?

RESPONSE:

The Province of Ontario is not mandating the use of COVID-19 vaccines. We strongly encourage all Ontarians to book their appointment as soon as they become eligible.

We are not able to provide legal advice. I would encourage you to seek legal advice regarding your question.

6. One of the things we have to consider before reopening is whether all our members have access to the vaccine. Do you have any idea when everyone 55+ will have access?

RESPONSE:

Across all public health units, the government is continuing to expand eligibility and access to the vaccine through channels such as mass vaccinations sites, hospital clinics, primary care settings and pharmacies.



As of yesterday, May 13, 2021, Ontario has expand booking eligibility for COVID-19 vaccine appointments at mass immunization clinics to individuals aged 40 and over, through the provincial booking system and call centre or directly through public health units that use their own booking system.

Members can book appointments at York Region’s website: [York Public Health COVID-19 Vaccination Site](#)

7. Lastly, I realize that this falls under Federal jurisdiction, but can you give us any update on vaccine availability? The various News outlets can make this very confusing.

RESPONSE:

The Federal government allocates vaccines to all provinces and territories.

Despite an unstable vaccine supply earlier this year, our government has built a strong foundation for its vaccine rollout. Ontario has administered first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to over 50 per cent of Ontarians aged 18 and over as of May 11, and we remains on track to have administered first doses to 65 per cent of Ontarians aged 18 and over by the end of May.

Due to a predictable and increased vaccine supply from the federal government, our government will be able to further expand delivery channels to vaccinate more Ontarians faster. To support this, we have developed an anticipated schedule to expand eligibility to receive the COVID-19 vaccine throughout May, with individuals aged 18 and older eligible to book through the provincial booking system as early as the week of May 24, 2021.

Timing for vaccinations is dependent on many factors, including supply of vaccines from the federal government, Health Canada approvals of vaccines, and local public health unit capacity and population needs. Phase Three of Ontario’s vaccine rollout is expected to begin in July 2021.

As of May 14, over 6.7 million first and second doses have been administered across the province. Over one million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Ontario since the start of May.

Dave, I trust that these responses will assist you and all your members. I do understand that this is a difficult time for many and I thank you and all your members for continuing to follow



public health measures. We do need to continue to do our part to help stop the spread of this virus. I am hopeful that with a strong vaccine rollout the day will come when we will be able to gather once again.

Best Regards,

Dawn Gallagher Murphy
Constituency Manager and EA,
MPP Christine Elliott, Newmarket-Aurora