

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, January 11, 2021

Niagara is ready for this week's arrival of the COVID-19 vaccine

The arrival of the Pfizer vaccine is a turning point in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Niagara. We expect delivery of the Pfizer vaccine in Niagara on Tuesday or Wednesday, and we are prepared to get doses into arms as soon as the shipment arrives.

Niagara Health (NH) and Niagara Region Public Health and Emergency Services (NRPH&ES) have been working together on the region's vaccination plan, starting with priority populations identified by the Ontario government for Phase 1 of COVID-19 vaccinations.

"We have planned aggressively and are well prepared to begin administering the COVID-19 vaccine in Niagara," says Lynn Guerriero, President and Interim CEO of Niagara Health. "With rising numbers of COVID-19 in the community and in the hospital, the vaccine will help us save lives, protect our hospital services and beat this pandemic. Every vaccine dose in an arm reduces the risk of the virus spreading in our region."

NH and NRPH&ES are scheduling vaccinations using a risk-based prioritization developed by the province. NH will begin vaccinating front-line healthcare workers in long-term care (LTC), high-risk retirement homes and the hospital at a vaccine clinic at the St. Catharines Site, followed by NH clinics opening in Niagara Falls, Welland, and/or other sites. At the same time, NRPH&ES will deploy small teams to long-term care homes and high-risk retirement homes to support their staff vaccinating the residents under their care. This builds on Public Health's existing partnership with these homes that is used to get almost all residents immunized to influenza each year.

"It is a relief that vaccines are finally arriving in Niagara. Throughout this pandemic, residents of long-term care homes and retirement homes have suffered the brunt of this pandemic," says Dr. Mustafa Hirji, Medical Officer of Health and Commissioner (Acting), Niagara Region Public Health and Emergency Services. "Almost 80% of those who've died in Niagara—150 people in our community—have been among these residents; 72 of them have died in the last 3 weeks alone. Vaccine will let us immunize these residents and their care providers, and begin to end this tragedy."

Niagara's vaccination plan is guided by the Province of Ontario's vaccine implementation framework. Groups to receive doses will continually expand over the coming months, consistent with this risk-based framework. Vaccination for the general public will follow in the third phase of the provincial framework for vaccine distribution.

"We understand that it is difficult to wait, and we empathize with the frustration given increasing deaths, hospitalizations and cases in our region related to COVID-19," says Ms. Guerriero. "The physicians and staff at Niagara Health have worked diligently through a number of extraordinary challenges including multiple outbreaks across three of our sites. We've provided management assistance in two LTC homes where infection rates among residents and staff were high and tragically, there were a high number of resident deaths. There has been a lot of advocacy on behalf of the hospital from community members across the region and everyone's support, teamed with the hard work and dedication of the entire NH team, is greatly appreciated."

“It is imperative that everyone in the community, including those vaccinated, continue to follow COVID-19 safety measures,” adds Dr. Hirji. “During the current shutdown, all of us should stay home as much as possible, only heading out for essential purposes like grocery shopping, work or medical appointments. When we have to be outside of the home, we should keep 2 metres distance from everyone else, properly wear a mask over our mouth and nose when around others, and wash our hands often.”

NH and NRPH&ES will be continually evolving the plan based on vaccine supply and will provide regular updates on our progress.

For information on the province’s vaccine implementation plan: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-vaccine-distribution-implementation-plan>

For updates on Niagara’s Vaccination Clinic: niagarahealth.on.ca/vaccinationclinic.

Media Contacts:

Niagara Health
Mary Taws, Senior Communications Specialist
289-968-1164
Mary.Taws@niagarahealth.on.ca

Niagara Region Public Health
Meredith Maxwell, Manager, Public Health Communications & Engagement
905-688-8248, ext. 7476
Meredith.Maxwell@niagararegion.ca