

January 20, 2021

To the Patients and Community Members of the Red Lake/Ear Falls Region,

As your healthcare team, we are excited that two new vaccines against COVID-19 have been approved by Health Canada. This development marks a historic moment for science, medicine, and humanity. We hope to provide you with information that helps you feel confident in choosing to receive the vaccine, when the opportunity is offered.

There are three phases to the Province of Ontario's Vaccine Distribution Implementation Plan, and each phase is dedicated to specific populations, beginning with those most vulnerable. Phase 1 will include Northwood Lodge residents, essential caregivers and staff, front-line hospital and medical staff, Indigenous populations and chronic home care recipients. Depending on age and other risk factors as set out by the Ministry of Health, low risk adults in our communities will be offered immunization in Phase 3. The Province's plan notes that moving through the three phases will take place from now to the end of 2021. There is a local Vaccine Committee comprised of members from the local hospital, primary care, long term care, EMS and Northwestern Health Unit. This group meets regularly to ensure efficient and ethical vaccine administration when the time comes.

Knowledge about COVID-19 is increasing at lightning speed and new vaccines may continue to be approved and be more readily available. More vaccine approvals would increase the quantity and speed of vaccine being distributed across the country. We can assure you that the vaccines for COVID-19 are safe and have passed all of the rigorous testing that is required for any approved vaccine in Canada.

Until a large portion of the population is vaccinated, we must all continue to do what we can to prevent the spread of the virus. Our COVID-19 case numbers have remained low in Red Lake and Ear Falls and we commend each of you who has committed to the preventive measures so far. Please continue to follow the advice of Northwestern Health Unit and the Provincial government. Stay home when you can, minimize travel, maintain at least 2 m of distance between those you do not live with, and wear a mask when you cannot distance.

Sincerely,

April Delorme, *Executive Director, Ear Falls Community Health Centre*

Dr. Lisa Habermehl MD CCFP FCFP, *Family Physician/Covid Assessment Centre Medical Lead*

Marilyn Herbacz, *CEO, Northwestern Health Unit*

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FAQs about COVID-19 Vaccinations

*Content has been adapted from a document created by the Primary Care Physicians of the Huron Perth & Area OHT Physician Advisory Council and modified as suitable for our context.

1. How effective is the vaccine?

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna mRNA vaccines have been shown to be over 94% effective at preventing COVID-19. Trials also showed that they both significantly decreased the severity of disease in the small number of people who contracted the virus after receiving the vaccine.

2. How long after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine will it take to be immune?

It typically takes a few weeks for the body to build immunity after vaccination. This means that you COULD still become infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 for a short time after receiving the vaccine. Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and the Moderna vaccine will require two shots in order to achieve full immunity.

3. Can people who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past be vaccinated?

Yes. At this time, experts are not sure how long someone is protected from getting sick again after recovering from COVID-19, and since re-infection is possible, even those who have previously had COVID-19 should be immunized.

4. Can the COVID-19 Vaccine cause a COVID-19 Infection?

No. None of the COVID-19 vaccines currently in development use the live virus that causes COVID-19. However, it is possible to develop side effects shortly after being vaccinated, including fever. These side effects are normal and are caused by your immune system responding to the vaccine. They are a sign that your immune system is working and doing what it is supposed to do.

5. What are the side effects of the vaccine?

The most frequent reactions are: pain at the site of injection (84.1%), fatigue (62.9%), headache (55.1%), muscle pain (38.3%), chills (31.9%), joint pain (23.6%) and fever (14.2%). These side effects are usually mild to moderate and resolve within a few days. Both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have similar side effects. If you experience a significant side effect following vaccination, please let your family doctor or another healthcare professional know.

6. Is there anyone who CANNOT receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. If you have a KNOWN anaphylactic allergy to the vaccine itself (i.e. you had an anaphylactic reaction after receiving your first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine), or any of the vaccine ingredients, you should not receive the COVID-19 vaccine. If you have had a severe allergic reaction to other vaccines, please talk a family physician or nurse practitioner, as they may recommend consultation with an allergist prior to receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. People with other severe allergies (such as foods, latex, etc.) may receive the vaccine with an extended period of observation following administration. Also, there are 3 main categories of people who were NOT included in the vaccine trials: 1) children under the age of 16; 2) women who were pregnant or breastfeeding; 3) People who were immunosuppressed due to disease or treatment, or suffering from an autoimmune disorder. However, this does not mean they can't receive the vaccine. We always have to weigh the potential risk versus potential benefit with medical treatments, including vaccines. So, if you fall into one of these categories, please talk to a family doctor or primary care provider about whether you should have the COVID-19 vaccine.

7. It seems like these mRNA vaccines were developed VERY quickly. Are they safe?

Yes. In fact, research on mRNA vaccines has been ongoing for over 10 years, and although the COVID-19 vaccines are the first ones to use this technology, the use of mRNA has been successful in other areas of medicine including cancer treatments. Additionally, the vaccines were produced faster than before not because of skipped steps, but because of unprecedented levels of collaboration and funding from around the world.

8. How was Health Canada able to approve the COVID-19 vaccine so quickly? Did they lower their safety standard for the vaccines?

No. The reason the COVID-19 vaccine was approved so quickly is not because standards changed. It is because Health Canada used a more efficient process for vaccine authorization. The safety requirements in clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccine were as strict as for any other vaccine.

9. Once I have been vaccinated with the required two doses, can I stop following public health measures like wearing a mask, physical distancing and self-isolating if I become sick?

As of right now, the answer is no. Until the majority of the population is immunized, we will have to continue to practice all the currently recommended public health measures. Other factors, including how the virus is spreading in communities, will also affect how long we must continue with these measures. Bottom line: the more people that get vaccinated, the better!

10. When will I be able to get my COVID-19 Vaccine?

The decisions about who gets the opportunity to be vaccinated first are made by the Ministry of Health and are based on Ontario's ethical framework (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ethical-framework-covid-19-vaccine-distribution>). Factors that are considered include population vulnerability and the most effective approaches to preventing the spread of COVID-19. We fully recognize the importance of making this vaccine available to everyone, and are making every effort to eliminate any barriers to access. We are committed to getting it done as safely and efficiently as possible. Please stay tuned and we promise that we will get you immunized as soon as we can.

Sources:

1. Health Care Provider package regarding COVID-19 Vaccine. Southwestern Public Health. <https://files.constantcontact.com/3171f730701/086c27fe-86ba-49e3-ae02-9d6e1aadd6c1.pdf>

2. COVID-19 Vaccines. Centre for Effective Practice. <https://tools.cep.health/tool/covid-19-vaccines/#emerging-evidencespecific-populations-and-allergic-reactions>

3. Statement from the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology. https://csaci.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2020/12/PressRelease-Pfizer-COVID-19vaccine-DEC14.pdf?utm_source=link.cep.health&utm_medium=urlshortener&utm_campaign=covid-vaccine