

## Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic Update

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**To:** Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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**Medical Officer of Health & CEO**

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## Recommendations

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It is recommended that the Board of Health:

1. Receive this report for information.

## Key Points

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- 3<sup>rd</sup> dose campaign for the COVID vaccine in specific high-risk populations began in October 2021;
- The 70+ population began receiving booster doses in November 2021;
- The paediatric population (5–11-year-old) became eligible for the COVID vaccine on November 27, 2021;
- December 2021 was the beginning of the Omicron variant wave; and
- Dec 15, 2021 all Ontarians aged 18 and older became eligible for a booster dose at a 3 month interval.

# Discussion

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The demand for COVID-19 vaccination in the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) region began to decline in July 2021. As the desire for vaccination decreased, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) moved mass immunization clinic sites to smaller clinic sites and returned the facilities that had so graciously accommodated the clinics, back to the municipalities for the public to enjoy. In Guelph, the clinic moved back to Chancellors Way office, in Fergus the clinic moved to the community room at the Centre Wellington Community Sportsplex and in Orangeville the clinic moved upstairs to the Humber community rooms at the Alder Street Community Centre. These sites were easily able to handle the decreased flow of clients.

## Three Dose Series for High-Risk Populations

In September 2021, new criteria were approved by the Ministry of Health (Ministry) to vaccinate high risk individuals with a three-dose series. Individuals who were immunosuppressed because of medical conditions or treatments were able to have a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine to provide added protection. The specific medical criteria that clients had to meet, required that clients work with their primary health care provider to receive their third dose whether at their primary care office, or by a referral, which indicated that they may receive the vaccine at another clinic in the region. The small increase in demand for COVID-19 vaccine that was created by these new criteria was easily accommodated within the capacity of existing WDGPH clinics at that time. In the months of September and October 2021, 1,553 third doses were provided in our vaccination clinics.

## Booster Doses for Clients 70 and Older

In November 2021, the Ministry approved clients who were age 70 or greater and who were a minimum of 168 days past their second dose to receive a booster dose. By the end of November 2021, there were 14,925 people in the WDG region, in this age group, that had met the minimum dose interval and were eligible to receive a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Although our vaccination sites were smaller, our community was still able to vaccine this population efficiently because of the support offered by our local pharmacies and family health teams (FHT's).

## COVID-19 Vaccinations for Clients 5-11 Years of Age

WDGPH anticipated children aged 5-11 years would be eligible for the COVID vaccine sometime in the fall of 2021. By working closely together to finalize a plan, public health

and primary care would be able to quickly vaccinate this pediatric population once the vaccine was approved and accessible. Pharmacies were already onboard to provide the vaccine and were just awaiting direction from the province on how to access the vaccine. There were over 25,000 children eligible across our region for the vaccine once approved.

The vaccine arrived in late November and pharmacies, primary care and WDGPH began vaccinating children 5-11-year-olds on November 27, 2021. Staff from the Guelph Family Health Team (GFHT) assisted in vaccinating at the Stone Road Mall site for the initial three weeks of the pediatric campaign and their support was crucial to the success in the city of Guelph. Other FHT's including, East Wellington Family Health Team, Mount Forest Family Health Team, Upper Grand Family Health Team, Minto-Mapleton Family Health Team, and Dufferin Area Family Health Team all ran pediatric clinics in their offices, with various levels of support from WDGPH. Their participation in the vaccine campaign was vital in getting this population vaccinated quickly. A tremendous effort was put forth by all these agencies and before Dec 25, 2021, more than 44% of the eligible population had received at least one dose of the vaccine.

To help ease the anxiety that many children experience around vaccinations, WDGPH implemented a variation of the Comfort, Ask, Relax, Distract program (CARD). This program recommended that extra efforts be made to ensure that the doctors provided some privacy to each client and attempted to make the environment as pleasing to children as possible by providing each of them with a distraction, like a small toy. All vaccinators reviewed techniques that assisted in promoting comfort and support to the young clients. Public Health Ontario provided an education session on the CARD program for all vaccination clinics in the province, which was led by four WDGPH staff. The staff presented on their experience using the CARD program and how WDGPH planned to implement the program into our mass clinics.

## **Omicron Variant**

The arrival of the Omicron variant in Canada in December 2021 complicated the rollout of our vaccination campaign. In mid-December, while WDGPH was focusing on vaccinating 5–11-year-olds with their first dose and providing three dose series to eligible populations, the province expanded the eligibility of booster doses from people over the age of 70, to all people over the age of 18. This change in eligibility was recommended by the province to help decrease the rapid spread of the Omicron variant in Ontario. Approximately an additional 100,000 clients were now eligible for a booster dose in the WDG region.

Suddenly the demands for the vaccine were very high, and WDGPH and other health units in Ontario did not have the capacity to meet this demand within their current facilities. The province requested that primary care pause their usual work to assist health units throughout Ontario with providing vaccines from mid-December and into January 2022. Locally, the response to assist in vaccination from primary care, assessment centres pharmacies and business, like Linamar Corporation, was overwhelming. All our partners rose to the challenge, and we worked together to meet the vaccination needs of our community.

## Vaccination Sites

Knowing that there would be a need to vaccinate the pediatric population at some point in the fall of 2021, WDGPH determined that the vaccination site at Chancellors Way was not capable of managing the volumes of clients anticipated. WDGPH staff began looking for a site that would meet the needs of this unique population and elected to set up a clinic at Stone Road Mall (SRM). SRM is the largest shopping centre in the region, so this site offered convenience and familiarity to much of the population. Additionally, SRM had excellent public transit service.

Initially, the pediatric clinics were accessed only by booked appointments but as the vaccination campaign continued, WDGPH made the strategic decision to provide drop-in appointments available during SRM's busy 2021 holiday shopping season. With this approach WDGPH sought to not only meet the demand from newly eligible groups, but also to increase visibility and hopefully promote uptake in population segments that had been eligible for some time. This strategy proved successful since 430 clients between the ages of 12-29 received their first dose at the SRM clinic from November 1, 2021, to January 31, 2022. This was especially significant since this age group had lagged behind other population segments in vaccine uptake.

Even with the additional space for vaccination at SRM, WDGPH was not able to provide an acceptable vaccination response to the announcement of all people 18 years and older eligible for a booster dose in mid-December. There simply were not enough staff or physical space to meet the demands. This was the case for all health units across the province. Provincially, healthcare providers were asked to support public health and locally, once again, the response was overwhelming.

The Guelph Family Health Team, with WDPGH support, set up a clinic at John F Ross Collegiate Vocational Institute in Guelph for 2 weeks and delivered 7,436 vaccinations. The teams then moved to the University of Guelph until Jan 23, 2022, delivering a further 8,651 vaccinations.

Primary Care across our region set up clinics in their offices or utilized WDGPH space to offer clinics. WDGPH frequently provided staff to support these clinics throughout December 2021 and January 2022 while demand for vaccination was high. In total, 15,933 doses were administered in Primary Care Offices during this period.

Linamar Clinic opened on December 20, 2021, to assist in vaccinating our community. This clinic quickly mobilized and remained open until February 4, 2022. They were able to vaccinate 7,587 people during this period.

Pharmacies across our region play a pivotal role in providing access to the COVID vaccine. Between December 1, 2021, and January 31, 2022, 57,357 doses were administered in our region by local pharmacies.

Between December 1, 2021, and January 31, 2022, over 150,000 doses of vaccine were administered in WDG vaccination clinics across all delivery channels combined. The table below clearly outlines the various delivery channels and the number of vaccines administered.

Category	Primary Care Office	Pharmacy	Hub and Outreach Clinics (WDGPH and Partner-led)	Other	Total
Dose 1 Ages 5-11	971	1,915	7,616	34	<b>10,536</b>
Dose 1 Ages 12+	206	1,466	1,528	332	<b>3,532</b>
Dose 2 Ages 5-11	768	937	4,307	16	<b>6,028</b>
Dose 2 Ages 12+	116	1,894	1,272	429	<b>3,711</b>
Dose 3 All Ages	13,800	51,230	52,802	7,142	<b>124,974</b>
Dose 4 All Ages	72	95	246	1,037	<b>1,450</b>
Total	<b>15,933</b>	<b>57,537</b>	<b>67,771</b>	<b>8,990</b>	<b>150,231</b>

In the week of January 17, 2022, WDGPH began to see a dramatic decrease in demand for COVID-19 vaccination. As a result, community partners slowly began to leave the vaccination clinics and began to resume their regular business. Over the next few weeks and the role of vaccinating once again became the primary responsibility of WDGPH. To date, community partners, specifically pharmacies, continue to offer the vaccine. However, because of strict vaccine handling requirements associated with COVID-19 vaccines, wastage continues to be a concern and therefore, redirecting clients to one of the WDGPH clinics is the preferred avenue.

## Conclusion

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The constant changes in late 2021 created very challenging conditions in the WDG region. Ongoing new vaccination criteria, the release of a new COVID-19 vaccination and the emergence of the Omicron variant all combined to create a very demanding environment. WDGPH rose to the challenge and vaccinated all eligible clients who wanted to be vaccinated in safe and professional environments. We look forward to continuing to vaccinate our community out of permanent vaccination sites as we continue to prepare for the future.

## Ontario Public Health Standard

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### Immunization

Goal: To reduce or eliminate the burden of vaccine preventable diseases through immunization.

### Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control

Goal: To reduce the burden of communicable diseases and other infectious diseases of public health significance.

## 2020 WDGPH Strategic Direction(s)

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*Double click checkbox to change from unchecked to checked.*

**Service Delivery:** We will provide our programs and services in a flexible, modern and accessible manner, and will ensure they reflect the immediate needs of our Clients and our role in the broader sector.

**System Transformation:** We will equip the Agency for change in all aspects of our work so that we are ready for transformational system change when the time comes.

**Knowledge Transfer:** We will ensure that our decision-making and policy development efforts are informed by meaningful health data at all times.

## Health Equity

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In an ongoing attempt to address health inequities, WDHPH continues to provide vaccination in various locations. Our main sites are all on public transportation routes and we continue to provide vaccine in our mobile and outreach clinics, specifically targeting areas that have lower vaccination rates.

## References

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N/A

## Appendices

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N/A