

2021 COVID-19 Vaccine Planning ‘Year in Review’

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

1. Receive this report for information.

Key Points

- Community partnerships and a multi-faceted approach were vital in overall success of WDGPH 2021 COVID-19 vaccine rollout across the region
- Developing local data systems for pre-registration and appointment booking allowed for WDGPH to quickly adapt to change with ease to provide uninterrupted service to the community
- Client evaluation survey of the vaccination clinics showed overwhelming positive feedback from the community on their clinic experience

Discussion

The Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) vaccine plan for 2021 consisted of a 3-phase rollout. Phase 1 focused on immunizing the high-risk population, as outlined in the Ontario Ministry of Health's guidance¹. As the vaccine supply increased and eligibility expanded to more of the population, the rollout evolved into phase 2 with mass deliveries of vaccine. Finally, phase 3 continued to provide vaccine in a steady state. Each phase had its own unique planning and operating considerations to ensure that vaccines were readily available to the Wellington, Dufferin and Guelph communities. In late November 2021, WDGPH began phase 4 to vaccinate children ages 5 to 11 years. Lessons learned from the past year will be used to ensure even more efficient and effective vaccine delivery moving forward.

Phase 1: High-Risk Population Vaccination Rollout January 2021 to March 2021

Situation Overview

Phase 1 of the vaccine rollout consisted of many challenges and successes that set the foundation for the remaining 2021 vaccination plan. Overall, the demand for the COVID-19 vaccine was high and the vaccine supply was not enough to meet that demand. This created a situation where careful prioritization based on several factors had to be implemented in order to distribute vaccine in the most ethical and equitable way possible to protect those most vulnerable from negative consequences of COVID-19.

Eligible Population

The first COVID-19 vaccine was administered in the Chancellors Way office in Guelph on January 7, 2021 to a Long-Term Care staff member. The eligible population who were the focus of the rollout in this phase consisted of:

- Long-term care and retirement home residents, staff and essential caregivers
- Adults 65 years and older
- Indigenous adults (including their immediate household members)
- Adult recipients of chronic home care
- Healthcare workers and emergency responders
- Congregate settings residents, staff and select essential caregivers

Planning Considerations

Phase 1 was focused on establishing the structure and mechanisms needed to successfully run a large-scale vaccination effort across Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph. Physical spaces were secured to set-up mass vaccination sites with the help of community partnerships. Collaborations with local health organizations, emergency services, businesses and municipal partners were key to setting up the foundational elements for mass vaccination sites.

Internally within the agency as part of the IMS structure, several different teams were established that were dedicated towards the COVID-19 vaccine rollout to ensure all elements ran smoothly for the community (e.g., clinic operations, call centre, vaccine appointment booking technology, logistics & supplies, and planning & prioritization).

During phase 1, a team of WDGPH staff, including the Medical Officer of Health, met daily to ensure the prioritization criteria was upheld and vaccine appointments were made available to the eligible population using the Ontario Ministry of Health guidance¹.

Challenges Faced in Phase 1

- COVID-19 vaccine supply was low and often ran into long shipment delays
- Demand from the public for COVID-19 vaccine was great, thus, it was important to find effective communication strategies to address community concerns

Successes Experienced in Phase 1

- Established a local WDGPH COVID-19 vaccination pre-registration and booking system to provide community members with appointments, based on the prioritization criteria and eligibility
- Strong community partnerships were formed to create vaccination clinic opportunities across Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph region

Phase 2: Mass Delivery of the COVID-19 Vaccine April 2021 to July 2021

Situation Overview

The foundation set in phase 1 provided WDGPH with the ability to adapt clinic planning and operations as needed to respond to the constant changes that took place over the course of phase 2 with respect to the vaccine administration guidance and prioritization

sequence. As vaccine supply began to gradually increase over phase 2, supply started to match the demand, which allowed WDGPH to scale up vaccination rollout across the region to its highest levels yet.

Eligible Population

The early part of phase 2 was still operating under strict prioritization criteria, slowly allowing more eligible groups as vaccine supply increased. In May and June, the time intervals between when groups became eligible were much shorter week-to-week which exponentially increased the vaccine rollout across the entire eligible population of 12 years and older. Overall, the eligible population in this phase of the rollout consisted of:

- Adults 64 years and younger (moving down age cohorts in 10-year increments)
- Individuals with chronic health conditions and select caregivers
- Essential workers who cannot work from home

Planning Considerations

Using our locally developed WDGPH pre-registration and booking system was instrumental in our ability to adapt to the constant changes in eligibility criteria and ensure that community members could receive their appointment in a timely manner to align with Ontario Ministry of Health guidance¹. Mass immunization clinics were running at maximum capacity in the peak of phase 2 and mobile immunization clinics in spaces across Wellington and Dufferin county increased as well to meet demand. One of the biggest operational and planning considerations faced in phase 2 was the overlap of providing first doses to the newly eligible population in addition to providing second doses to those individuals who had their first dose in phase 1.

Challenges Faced in Phase 2

- Countless “pivot” moments from changes to Ontario Ministry of Health guidance¹ that required significant adaptations to vaccine rollout plans, operations and information technology to ensure seamless transition for community members
- WDGPH region was named: as one of the provincial “hot spots” with a postal code area that was to be prioritized in the sequence ahead of others due to perceived risk of COVID-19 transmission; and a “Delta hot spot” that accelerated second dose eligibility within our region for anyone 12 years and older

Successes Experienced in Phase 2

- Due to our adaptability, WDGPH was consistently in alignment with the Provincial timeline to move through the prioritization sequence of the eligible population
- Achieved record number of vaccinations administered in the month of June 2021 with 137,022 total doses administered from June 1 to 30

Phase 3: Steady State Vaccination Rollout August 2021 to Early November 2021

Situation Overview

Phase 3 was best characterized by persistence, as community members continued to steadily book vaccination appointments, even though the demand became less and less over time. Phase 3 represented a much more targeted vaccine rollout, informed by local vaccination rate data, to help provide low-barrier opportunities for community members across the WDG region. Policy levers were also introduced in phase 3 across the province as part of the “last mile” strategy to increase vaccination rates.

Eligible Population

Phase 3 continued to provide the COVID-19 vaccine to anyone 12 years and older. In August, the eligibility criteria were altered slightly to allow any youth turning 12 years this 2021 calendar year to be eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, select groups became eligible to receive a third “booster” dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in this phase of the rollout, including:

- Residents of high-risk congregate settings (e.g., long-term care or retirement homes, chronic care hospitals)
- Immunocompromised populations (e.g., receiving active chemotherapy)
- Adults age 70 years and older
- First Nations, Inuit and Métis adults (including their household members)
- Select group of health care workers

Planning Considerations

Early phase 3 was a time of transition, closing the mass vaccination sites and shifting to smaller-scale targeted clinics across WDG region. Outreach clinics and pop-up vaccination sites at community events became a focus in early Phase 3 to create easily accessible opportunities for individuals. Vaccination clinics also shifted to become more

walk-in style, where community members no longer needed to book an appointment but could simply drop-by any clinic that was available in the community. The strategy behind planning vaccination clinics in phase 3 was to make them as easily accessible as possible for residents. In late September and early October, the effects of the policy levers implemented produced an increase in vaccination rates in the WDG region and across the province.

With the introduction of third “booster” doses, careful consideration went into how to book those who qualified for an appointment. Based on eligibility criteria, clients were contacted directly by WDGPH to help book into an available appointment time to receive a third dose. As more residents became eligible to book a third dose, the self-booking tool was adapted to allow individuals to book themselves a third dose booster vaccine appointment online or over the phone.

Challenges Faced in Phase 3

- Working with difficult clients who expressed their displeasure to staff at clinics about receiving the COVID-19 vaccine as a result of a workplace vaccination policy or the provincial vaccination proof certificate program
- Diminishing returns on COVID-19 vaccine interest and uptake, especially in select areas of WDG region, making those areas vulnerable to greater COVID-19 transmission and outbreaks

Successes Experience in Phase 3

- Unique and new partnerships formed with various stakeholders across WDG region to host outreach pop-up vaccination clinics and provide opportunities for community members
- Continuously reached new milestones of high vaccination rates (e.g., greater than 90% fully vaccinated) in multiple areas within WDG region

Upcoming...Phase 4: Vaccinating Children 5-11 years Late November 2021 to March 2022

Vaccination plans are underway now that Health Canada has approved the COVID-19 vaccine for children 5 to 11 years old. The vaccination plan is multi-faceted, drawing on strong partnerships formed with primary care, pharmacy, municipal partners, community health centres, school boards and children and youth treatment centres to provide a variety of opportunities for families to attend a vaccination clinic. Although there will be multiple waves of readiness amongst parents to vaccinate children from COVID-19, the

goal is to vaccinate 90% of the children ages 5 to 11 who reside in WDG region. WDGPH intends to provide ‘wrap around’ support to all organizations assisting with vaccination clinics, which will consist of providing staffing support (e.g., data entry, nurses), training and clinic supplies.

COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Feedback from Clients

Vaccination clinics were continuously evaluated by WDG Public Health clinic managers and practice consultants to ensure that a client’s vaccine experience was safe and efficient. In addition, WDGPH conducted a Client Experience Survey from May to August 2021 in all COVID-19 vaccine clinics led by WDGPH. The survey results were used to gauge client satisfaction and make improvements where needed to certain aspects of the clinic (e.g., appointment booking process; recovery area post-immunization). Approximately 1,200 surveys were completed with most respondents attending the mass immunization sites in Guelph, Fergus and Orangeville. The client feedback was overwhelmingly positive:

- 96% of respondents stated an overall satisfaction with their COVID-19 vaccine clinic experience;
- 97% of respondents indicated all aspects of the clinic worked well (e.g., location, signage, screening, check-in/check-out, vaccine administration, recovery); and
- 97% of respondents reported that clinic staff were friendly, helpful, professional and informative

Conclusion

The COVID-19 vaccine rollout was an unprecedented challenge for WDGPH that tested all elements of service delivery as a public health agency. However, despite the sizeable scope of this task, along with the unwavering support of the community, WDGPH led an extremely successful vaccination effort. The WDGPH 2021 COVID-19 vaccine rollout represented unparalleled community collaboration, bringing together countless partners from all different sectors, to help protect the WDG community from the harms of COVID-19.

2020 WDGPH Strategic Direction(s)

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

The WDGPH COVID-19 vaccine rollout applied a health equity lens to vaccine distribution, following the Ontario Ministry of Health Guidance¹. WDGPH outreach clinics were informed by population health and social determinants of health data to provide low-barrier opportunities for vaccination in targeted areas. To reach vulnerable populations, partnerships were formed with local organizations that had established connections with community members and were able to provide vaccination opportunities through their organizations.

References

1. Ontario Ministry of Health. Ontario's COVID-19 vaccination plan [Internet]. Last updated 2021 Sept 14. Available from: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/ontarios-covid-19-vaccination-plan>