

2023 Fall FluVID Campaign

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Key Points

- Influenza is a highly contagious viral respiratory infection that circulates in the fall and winter months in Ontario.
- Vaccination against influenza seasonally can help reduce the morbidity and mortality of the illness.
- Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues to circulate locally, although the levels are the lowest since the pandemic. The number of COVID-19 cases are expected to increase in the fall at the same time as other seasonal respiratory viruses such as influenza.
- COVID-19 vaccination can help reduce the morbidity and mortality of the illness.

Background

Influenza

Influenza is a viral respiratory illness. This illness was estimated to cause approximately 12,200 hospitalizations and 3,500 deaths annually in Canada prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Influenza, or seasonal flu, presents a burden on the healthcare system and the public in general in Ontario during the fall and winter months.

To reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with influenza, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends annual influenza vaccination for everyone six months of age and older who does not have contraindications to the vaccine.¹

Particular populations are strongly recommended to receive the vaccine due to complications and risks of severe disease or hospitalization.² In 2023/2024 these populations include:

- Children six months up to five years of age
- Adults 65 years of age and older
- Adults and children with certain chronic health conditions
- Individuals who are pregnant
- People of any age who are residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities
- Indigenous peoples
- Healthcare and other care providers, including childcare providers
- Household contacts of people at high risk
- Healthy individuals working in essential services (e.g., grocery, pharmacy, utility services) where absenteeism due to illness would cause an interruption in essential services
- People in direct contact with poultry infected with avian influenza during culling operations
- Household contacts of expectant women or infants younger than six months of age, because infants younger than six months are at high risk but cannot receive the vaccine

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

COVID-19 is a respiratory viral infection caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus that started the pandemic in early 2020. On May 5, 2023, more than three years after the start of the pandemic, and greater than 765 million confirmed cases and almost seven million deaths worldwide, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared “with great hope” an end to COVID-19 as a public health emergency.³ The WHO did not however state that the pandemic is over, and the world must adjust to having this virus remain as a threat to health for the coming years.⁴

Although not zero, the number of local cases confirmed during the summer months are the lowest they have been since the onset of the pandemic. Although COVID-19 has not declared itself as a seasonal virus, similar to influenza, the number of cases is expected to increase as the seasons change this fall and people move indoors due to colder weather. Increased protection will help to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the health system while other respiratory viruses, including influenza and RSV are circulating.⁵

Beginning in the fall of 2023, NACI recommends:

- A complete COVID-19 vaccination series for those who have not been immunized, and
- A booster dose for individuals aged six months and up.

NACI makes strong recommendation for a booster dose to the following populations:

- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Residents of long-term care homes and other congregate living settings
- Individuals with underlying medical conditions that place them at higher risk of severe COVID-19
- Individuals who are pregnant
- Individuals in or from First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities
- Members of racialized and other equity-deserving communities
- People who provide essential community services

Discussion

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) is preparing for the increase in influenza and COVID-19 levels by preparing the community in multiple ways. During the summer months, WDGPH had several communications with long-term care homes, retirement homes, and other congregate settings to ensure they are prepared to vaccinate staff and residents as early in the season as possible with both influenza and COVID-19 vaccines. This requires upfront planning on their end to ensure they have appropriate staffing, approved storage for vaccines, consents, and access to supplies.

Homes who employ registered healthcare staff (registered practical nurses, registered nurses and physicians) were informed they should be prepared to deliver the vaccines on their own with minimal support from WDGPH. Homes without registered healthcare staff should be looking for options in the community for their staff and residents to attend for vaccination or connecting with local pharmacies to come into the home to vaccinate.

WDGPH is working with pharmacies, physicians, and local hospitals to ensure they are prepared to deliver the influenza and COVID-19 vaccines to clients and patients this fall. Pharmacies and primary care offices are two of the largest channels for residents in Wellington, Dufferin and Guelph (WDG) to access vaccines including the influenza and COVID-19 vaccines.

WDGPH also spent the summer months inspecting fridges across our community in preparation for the fridges to house influenza and COVID-19 vaccines this fall. These inspections occurred in over 234 locations across WDG and included both physicians and pharmacies.

Finally, WDGPH is preparing to deliver a variety of influenza and COVID-19 (FluVID) vaccine clinics across WDG for a six-week period beginning the week of October 16, 2023. The timing of the arrival of both the influenza and COVID-19 vaccines is not confirmed at this time but typically vaccines arrive in the early fall. In addition to offering vaccine in the three main WDGPH offices, clinics will also operate in locations at Stone Road Mall in Guelph, Fergus Sportsplex in Wellington County and Monora Park Pavilion in Dufferin County. These clinics will operate weekly including one Saturday clinic in each area. In addition, WDGPH will operate pop-up clinics in remote areas to optimize access to vaccines.

Health Equity Implications

WDGPH is committed to ensuring that all residents have access to the influenza and COVID-19 vaccine. As such, this year's FluVID campaign will have a multi-faceted approach incorporating as many service providers as possible to make accessing the vaccine as easy as possible.

WDGPH will be offering pop-up clinics to address access issues for populations who live in rural areas as well as individuals who may struggle to access the vaccine in mainstream clinic environments.

Conclusion

WDGPH is creating and employing a fulsome FluVID campaign that incorporates all service providers to deliver the influenza and COVID-19 vaccines concurrently to as many people in the community who are willing to receive it. WDGPH is acutely aware of the implications of low vaccination rates on the health of the population and healthcare system. Vaccinating a large portion of the population as early as possible and focusing on the high-risk population will help to decrease illness and the impact of these respiratory viruses on both individuals and the broader healthcare system.

Ontario Public Health Standards

Foundational Standards

- Population Health Assessment
- Health Equity
- Effective Public Health Practice
- Emergency Management

Program Standards

- Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- Food Safety
- Healthy Environments
- Healthy Growth and Development
- Immunization
- Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- Safe Water
- School Health
- Substance Use and Injury Prevention

2023 WDGPH Strategic Directions

People & Culture: WDGPH has an organizational culture of engagement, inclusion and agility.

Partner Relations: WDGPH collaborates with partners to address priority health issues in the community.

Health System Change: WDGPH is positioned to be an agent of change within the broader health sector.

References

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2. Government of Canada. Public Health Agency of Canada. National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI): Statements and publications. Summary of NACI Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for 2023-2024. May 2023. Available from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/national-advisory-committee-immunization-summary-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2023-2024.html>
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4. CBC News. WHO downgrades COVID pandemic, says it's no longer a global emergency. May 2023. Available from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/who-pandemic-not-emergency-1.6833321>
5. Government of Canada. Public Health Agency of Canada. An Advisory Committee Statement (ACS) National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) Guidance on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in the fall of 2023. Available from <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/national-advisory-committee-immunization-guidance-use-covid-19-vaccines-fall-2023/statement.pdf>