

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Immunization for Special Populations
Date: January 12, 2021
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To: Primary Care Providers, Physicians, Nurse Practitioners
From: Dr. Matthew Tenenbaum, Associate Medical Officer of Health

Background

This month, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) is beginning to immunize priority populations with two COVID-19 vaccines: the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the Moderna vaccine. The priority group to receive vaccine will be residents, staff and essential caregivers of long-term care (LTC) and high-risk retirement homes (RH), with additional populations to follow based on direction from Ontario's Ministry of Health and the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force.

At present, there is a very limited supply of vaccine and it must be directed to those groups identified by the Task Force as first to receive vaccine. These individuals will need to receive 2 doses of vaccine. Any extra doses will be given to at-risk hospital workers based on a provincially created priority setting document. Community health care workers (nurses, physicians, dentists, pharmacists, optometrists etc.) will be offered vaccine as supplies allow and based on a provincial risk assessment starting later in February and continuing throughout the month of March.

Please do not book an appointment to receive vaccine unless you have been notified by a LTC, RH or hospital that you are eligible to do so. All planned vaccine programs are dependent on vaccine supplies which are expected to increase in the month of April onwards.

Immunization of Special Populations

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) provides recommendations about who should, or should not, receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Importantly, there are several 'special populations' for whom the available COVID-19 vaccines are not routinely recommended. These populations include:

- Individuals who are immunosuppressed due to disease or treatment or those with an autoimmune disorder;
- Individuals who are currently pregnant; and
- Individuals who are currently breastfeeding.

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These populations were not included in the Phase III clinical trials for the available COVID-19 vaccines or had very small representation. NACI currently offers a Strong Recommendation that these populations should not be offered vaccine until further evidence is available. However, NACI also offers a Discretionary Recommendation that individuals in these populations may be offered vaccine if:

- A risk assessment deems that the benefits outweigh the potential risks for the individual; and
- Informed consent includes discussion about the absence of evidence on the use of COVID-19 vaccine in this population.

Individuals in these groups who would like to receive the COVID-19 vaccine must have an individualized risk assessment with their health care provider. Primary care providers (and other providers with whom a patient has existing relationships) are best positioned to have this conversation. Mass immunization clinics run by WDGPH will not conduct individualized risk assessments for patients. WDGPH does not have access to the individual's health record or the appropriate staff to conduct individualized risk assessments.

The Ministry of Health will be providing a guidance document to assist health care providers who are having these conversations with their patients. This will be accompanied by a provincial attestation form that patients must complete indicating that they have been counselled by their health care provider. Individuals in the 'special populations' above will be asked to present a signed attestation form before being immunized. Until the provincial form is available, WDG residents are asked to use the attached Attestation Form adapted from Toronto Public Health.

WDGPH will share Ministry of Health guidance and other resources to support health care providers who are discussing the COVID-19 vaccine with their patients. Updated resources can always be found on our website at <https://www.wdgpublichealth.ca/healthcare-providers/covid-19-information-healthcare-providers/covid-19-vaccine-information>. WDGPH will continue to publish weekly Vaccine Bulletins to answer questions that health care providers have about the COVID-19 vaccine. Suggestions for topics for further education can be sent to Matthew.Tenenbaum@wdgpublichealth.ca.

References:

National Advisory Committee on Immunization. Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines. [Internet]. 2020 Dec 23. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/recommendations-use-covid-19-vaccines.html>

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