

York Public Health begins distributing Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to long-term care homes

York Region Public Health has begun the process of delivering Moderna COVID-19 mRNA vaccines to long-term care homes in York Region. "This is an exciting and hopeful step forward in our fight against COVID-19," said Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Medical Officer of Health. "By prioritizing vaccines for residents of long-term care homes, we are protecting some of our most vulnerable York Region residents." Over the past several weeks, York Region has been working closely with health system partners on the rollout and administration of the COVID-19 vaccine. This includes working with the Province of Ontario, the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health, local hospitals, local long-term care and retirement homes and other groups in key areas related to vaccine administration, transportation, training and storage. In this first step, York Region Public Health will distribute the vaccine to long-term care homes. Staff at the homes will administer the vaccine on-site to their residents. The vaccine will help to protect approximately 3,700 York Region long-term care residents in 28 homes. Sadly, to date, York Region has lost 257 residents to COVID-19 within institutional settings. Southlake Regional Health Centre and Mackenzie Health were included among 19 Ontario hospital sites to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and administer to staff and essential caregivers at long-term care homes and high-risk retirement homes in York Region and hospital workers based on the Ontario Government's Ethical Framework for COVID-19 vaccine administration. Following distribution to long-term care homes, York Region Public Health will begin delivery of the Moderna vaccine to retirement homes and other congregate care settings for seniors. Out of respect for residents living in long-term care, and for the safety and security of the vaccine, York Region will not publicly share specific dates and times of vaccine delivery. York Region continues to work with our health system partners on the distribution of the vaccine to residents who wish to receive one. The Ontario government has indicated most Ontario residents will be offered the vaccine by early fall 2021. The COVID-19 vaccine is voluntary, but highly encouraged for those who are eligible – not only for personal protection but for the safety and well-being of others. For long-term care residents who are unable to consent to the vaccine for themselves, the long-term care home will work with their substitute decision-maker to obtain consent prior to the immunization date. Family members and substitute decision-makers should contact their respective homes for more information with questions or concerns. York Region is one of four areas in southern Ontario identified by the province to participate in this initial phase and deliver vaccine to select long-term care and high-risk retirement homes. Best practices learned during these pilots will be shared and applied within public health units across Ontario as they begin their local distribution. As vaccinations begin in Ontario, it is important to continue following public health measures to keep everyone safe and healthy, including avoiding social gatherings, practice physical distancing, wear a mask when required and wash your hands frequently. For more information on COVID-19 vaccines and York Region's role, please visit york.ca/COVID19vaccine