

Guidance for Immunization Priorities During COVID-19

Update to York Region health care providers as of April 24, 2020

Even though the focus is primarily on COVID-19 right now, there are other diseases that still pose a risk to the York Region community. Immunization and herd immunity are still an important part of keeping York Region residents healthy. On April 20, 2020, Ontario's Ministry of Health issued a Guidance for Immunization Service Providers during COVID-19. The Ministry recommends that the following immunization services should still be provided, as long as the proper infection prevention and control measures are in place, such as physical distancing between patients, disinfection of surfaces and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) where appropriate.

Routine vaccines – infants and children	<p>Priority vaccinations for infants and children, primary series/booster doses:</p> <p>2, 4 and 6 month vaccines: Pertussis, tetanus, diphtheria, Hib, polio, pneumococcal and rotavirus</p> <p>12 and 15 month vaccines: Meningococcal, pneumococcal, measles, mumps, rubella and varicella</p> <p>18 month vaccine: Pertussis, tetanus, diphtheria, Hib, polio</p> <p>If you are seeing infants and children for milestone visits or other health issues, the opportunity to provide immunizations based on Ontario's Routine Immunization Schedule should be considered.</p> <p>This includes hospital inpatients, residents of an institution, or where other care is continuing to be provided.</p>
Routine vaccines – adolescents and adults	<p>Most routine vaccines for adolescents and adults can be given at the earliest opportunity</p> <p>If you are seeing adolescents or adults for urgent health issues or for necessary visits like prenatal care, the opportunity to provide immunizations based on Ontario's Routine Immunization Schedule should be considered.</p> <p>This includes pregnant women who have not received an adult dose of Tdap vaccine, hospital inpatients, residents of an institution, or where other care is continuing to be provided.</p> <p>As school settings and York Region facilities are closed, in-school immunization clinics and public health's community immunization clinics have been cancelled until further notice.</p>
Seniors	<p>Opportunities to provide pneumococcal vaccination according to Ontario's Routine Immunization Schedule should be taken. COVID-19 illness and outcomes are more severe for seniors and the virus affects respiratory function.</p> <p>This includes hospital inpatients, residents of an institution, or where other care is continuing to be provided.</p> <p>Having individuals attend a clinic setting only for vaccination should be avoided.</p>

High-Risk Immunization Schedule	<p>Opportunities to provide vaccination should be taken, according to the Ontario Immunization Schedules for high risk individuals.</p> <p>This includes hospital inpatients, residents of an institution, or where other care is continuing to be provided.</p> <p>Having individuals attend a clinic setting only for vaccination should be avoided.</p>
Outbreak response/case and contact management for vaccine-preventable diseases	<p>Immunization services for post-exposure prophylaxis, including hepatitis B vaccination to newborns and outbreak control as a prevention and management strategy, should not be delayed or deferred.</p>
Health Care Workers	<p>Vaccinations for health care providers and those working in health care settings should not be delayed as these individuals are at increased risk of exposure to vaccine-preventable diseases.</p>

Vaccine Reminders

Most routine vaccines, if delayed, can be given at the earliest opportunity. Vaccines given as a series can have their schedule adjusted accordingly. The Canadian Immunization Guide advises that interruption of a vaccine series does not require restarting the series as delays between doses do not result in reduction of antibody concentrations for most multi-dose products. It is important to complete a vaccine series, so that an effective level of protection can be attained. Consult the specific vaccine schedules and monographs for details on each vaccine and how it may be administered. Remember to maintain appropriate infection prevention and control practices including the necessary PPE and disinfection practices, as appropriate.

Vaccine Storage and Handling Guidance

In addition to guidance on immunization, the Ministry also provided some guidance on vaccine storage and handling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Normal Vaccine Storage and Handling Protocols should continue to be followed:

- Even if you have limited your office hours, continue to monitor and record fridge temperatures as you normally would when open normal hours.
- Indicate any office closures in your temperature log book
- To minimize vaccine due to cold chain failure or product expiry, minimize your vaccine stock where possible. Consider any reduction in hours and patients you may be experiencing due to COVID-19.
- As normal, report cold chain incidents to public health as soon as they are discovered; maintain the exposed vaccines in the refrigerator on hold, and clearly indicate that the vaccines cannot be used until assessed by public health.
- York Region Public Health's Registered Pharmacy Technicians are not conducting annual fridge inspections at this time. Once COVID-19 measures are lifted, we will be in touch to book your annual fridge inspection.
- York Region Public Health **is** conducting fridge inspections for new facilities, new fridges and any replacement fridges.

Please visit york.ca/vaccineinventory for information on vaccine storage and handling protocols.

For more information

Call our dedicated health professional COVID-19 line at **1-877-464-9675 ext. 77280** (8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days a week, after hours call 905-953-6478). Continue to visit york.ca/healthprofessionals, york.ca/covid19 and Ontario.ca/covid19 for up to date information on COVID-19.

