

## Children five to 11 now eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccine

By Nate Smelle

As of Tuesday, Nov. 23 children in Ontario between the ages of five and 11 became eligible to receive their COVID-19 vaccine. As part of this campaign, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization has advised that children within this age bracket receive two smaller doses of a vaccine at least eight weeks apart.

Parents and parental guardians are now able to book appointments for their children using the provincial vaccine portal; or by calling the provincial vaccine call centre at 1-833-943-3900. Appointments can also be arranged by contacting some local public health units, pharmacies, or with one's primary care providers.

In order to be eligible to receive the vaccine, children must be turning five years old by the end of the year. Therefore, children turning five-years-old in 2022 will become eligible to be vaccinated on Jan. 1, 2022.

Health Minister Christine Elliott spoke about the province's decision to expand their vaccination campaign during a press conference on Monday, Nov. 22.

During the press conference, Elliot indicated that they received more than 400,000 child-sized doses of the Pfizer vaccine. She also noted that the province also expects to receive another shipment, that will bring more than 600,000 doses.

Explaining how the government plans to distribute the vaccine, Elliot said it is to be distributed according to the the distribution of children in certain areas of the province; with priority being given to areas where the overall vaccination rate is lower.

?Of course pharmacies are going to continue to be great partners with us, but we certainly know that parents of a younger children five to seven year olds would prefer to have their child vaccinated at their pediatrician's office, or primary care family doctor; but for older children, they're okay if they're vaccinated in pharmacies and mass vaccination clinics as well. But we know that that's going to be important for parents to be there,? Elliot said.

Acknowledging that many parents and caregivers still may have some concerns; and, that they might want more information about the vaccines for younger children, Elliot recommended that they call the provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at Sick Kids Hospital at: 1-833-943-3900.

Addressing expected concerns from parents and guardians regarding getting their children vaccinated, Elliot said, we know that at least 50 per cent of all the parents of children in this age group are ready to have their child vaccinated right away. About 30 per cent want to have more information, and that's why I think it's really important that we have these information channels available through Sick Kids, so they can ask whatever questions they need to ask. Some may also call their pediatrician or family doctor as well, because we know that parents want to be careful and cautious with their children.

Elliot said she understands that it's natural for parents to have questions before having their child vaccinated; and, for them to want to have the resources available to inform their decision. However, speaking directly to parents who falsely believe their kids don't need to be vaccinated, because they are at lower risk of getting COVID-19, she responded ?Well, unfortunately we know right now that a third of the new cases of COVID are in school-aged children, so i think that speaks to the need to get children vaccinated.

Stressing the importance of having children vaccinated the next morning on CP24 Morning News, only minutes before the vaccine portal became open to children aged five to 11, Ontario's chief medical officer of health Dr. Kieran Moore said he sees significant benefits to the province's enhanced vaccination program. Noting how vital it is for parents to feel supported in their decision making, he added ?We are seeing the case counts only increase in this age group. As we've allowed them to have more and more social activities, this virus wants to spread in small social environments. And, as a result, we're seeing more cases in this age group - 111

cases just yesterday that tested positive. And, sadly the risk of hospitalization is going up in this age group as well. So, it's very timely to have this vaccine available to parents and children.?