

MEDIA RELEASE

First long-term care workers in the southeast get their COVID-19 vaccines

Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2021

KINGSTON, Ont. – Today, the first long-term care workers in southeastern Ontario received their initial doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at Kingston Health Sciences Centre (KHSC), the only COVID-19 vaccine dispenser in the region so far.

“I have never in my life been so excited or thankful to receive a vaccine,” says Nanette Isaac, a registered nurse at Extendicare in Kingston, who was the first long-term care worker in the region to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. “This gives me tremendous hope, and confidence that I am doing everything I can to protect myself and stay healthy for my friends, family and the residents of the care home.”

Residents, health-care workers and essential caregivers in long-term care homes and high-risk retirement homes have been prioritized to receive this first batch of vaccines. KHSC received its first shipment of the vaccine this morning, and anticipates it will receive additional shipments this month.

“We believe we’ll be able to provide first doses of the vaccine to over 1,900 prioritized long-term care and high-risk retirement home residents, health-care workers and caregivers throughout the southeast region in the coming days,” says Dr. David Pichora, KHSC’s president and CEO. “This signals brighter days ahead. It also represents the tremendous amount of collaboration – among health-care partners including all three public health agencies in the region – that has made it possible to be ready to deliver a safe, effective COVID-19 vaccine to the prioritized group in southeastern Ontario.”

In the past month, KHSC acquired two medical-grade freezers in which to safely store the Pfizer vaccine at -70 C. The frozen vials are then thawed, diluted and drawn up in a syringe. Doses are registered with an expiration time, and must be used within six hours from the time of dilution to be effective.

“We are confident that everyone who chooses to be vaccinated for COVID-19 will be able to receive the vaccine when there is sufficient supply of this and other vaccines in the coming months, and as vaccination and distribution are expanded beyond hospital sites,” says Dr. Pichora.

The by-invitation and by-appointment only clinic located at KHSC’s Kingston General Hospital site will run as long as it is needed. A taskforce involving all three public health agencies in the region, in partnership with KHSC, is preparing a mobile vaccination program for the residents, staff and essential caregivers of long-term care homes and high-risk retirement homes.

Dr. Gerald Evans, medical director of Infection Prevention and Control at KHSC, cautions that safety measures such as mask wearing, physical distancing and frequent hand-washing, will still need to be taken as not everyone will be vaccinated at the same time, and those waiting to be vaccinated need to be protected.

“COVID-19 vaccination will help us better manage the pandemic, and help us protect and care for our most vulnerable patients, but we can’t let our guard down and must continue to take the safety precautions necessary to protect everyone in our communities,” says Dr. Pichora.

Screening, along with access and family presence restrictions, remain in place at all KHSC sites.

The general public is encouraged to visit <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-ontario> for more information about Ontario’s COVID-19 vaccination program. Please do not call the hospital, public health or your doctor’s office about vaccination at this time, as it has not yet been confirmed when vaccinations will be available to the general public.

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