

## Questions & Answers

### Community Telephone Town Hall

April 22, 2021

The following is a summary of questions received during the recent Telephone Town Hall, held on April 22, 2021. Because these questions did not get answered during the call, Lakeridge Health is providing the following responses:

#### COVID-19 and Variants

##### Q1. Will the virus be here in three to five years?

While it's very difficult to predict what will happen with the current strain of the COVID-19 virus, experts believe that COVID-19 is here to stay. The future depends on a lot of variables including whether people develop lasting immunity to the virus, whether seasonality affects its spread and most importantly, the choices made by governments and individuals.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), when a virus is widely circulating in a population and causing many infections, the likelihood of a virus mutating increases. The more opportunities a virus has to spread, the more it replicates – and the more opportunities it has to undergo changes.

In the face of these unknowns, early evidence suggests that following public health guidelines such as regular hand-hygiene and wearing masks, performed beyond the strict lockdowns will help to stem the tide of infection. For more information, visit: [Nature](#) and [WHO](#).

##### Q2. What are common symptoms of COVID-19 and are they different in Wave 3 or with the variant?

Symptoms of COVID-19 can vary from person to person. Some people may develop a sore throat, congestion and lose their sense of smell. Some people feel very unwell. They may have a fever, a new or worsening cough and experiencing shortness of breath or having difficulty breathing. If you or a loved one has any symptoms of COVID-19, do not delay, book a COVID-19 test today at [COVIDswab.lh.ca](#). Delaying a test could potentially spread the virus. For a more full list of symptoms, visit the provincial website at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/>.

##### Q3. Do you have any advice on how to talk to people who are not taking this pandemic seriously? Or perhaps don't want to get the vaccine?

The medical evidence and the daily data we receive from credible sources, such as the Ontario [Science Table](#) COVID-19 Advisory Table for Ontario, is clear: The impact of the global pandemic is very real. However, there is a lot of misinformation about the virus online and in the public domain. So, it's common to encounter people who are misinformed.

Before you engage with the individual about their views or behaviour, evaluate the situation and decide whether you wish to start a conversation to correct their misinformation.

**Q4. Why have COVID-19 cases gone up so quickly in Durham Region? What can we do to prevent the spread of the virus?**

Cases, particularly those related to the new variants of concern or “VOCs” have increased rapidly during Wave 3 in Durham Region and in other parts of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Today, these variants make up the majority of new cases and have a higher transmissibility rate than the earlier strain of the virus.

To prevent further spread of the virus, we all need to do our part and follow the provincial Stay-at Home order, while following public health guidelines. These include getting tested and self-isolating if any symptoms develop, performing regular hand hygiene, wearing a mask and limiting contact to only those who live in your household.

**Q5. If you are admitted to the hospital with COVID-19, what kinds of treatment does a patient receive?**

Several treatments for COVID-19 are available that have been shown to help people with severe infection. An antiviral medication called Remdesivir may be an option for some people. For those requiring oxygen therapy, an anti-inflammatory drug called Dexamethasone is usually given. And in those with severe illness, another medication called Tocilizumab may help. Lakeridge Health is also participating in several ongoing trials of new treatments for COVID-19.

**COVID-19 Vaccines**

**Q6. Is it safe to get the vaccine and what are the side effects?**

Canada has one of the most thorough systems in the world to approve new vaccines. COVID-19 vaccines approved by Health Canada are safe, effective and will save lives. Most people receiving the vaccine will have mild local symptoms at the injection site. About 50 per cent may experience fatigue or headache, and 10-15 per cent of people may develop a fever. If you have specific questions about your personal health situation and a potential reaction to the vaccine, please speak directly with your health care provider.

**Q7. Can someone with a history of allergic reactions receive the vaccine?**

Someone with a history of allergies can definitely receive the vaccine – it doesn’t matter whether it’s an allergy to other vaccines, medications, insect bites, or pollen. However, people with these histories should speak to their health care provider prior to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.

**Q8. How effective is the vaccine on the variants?**

There is limited information on how effective the current available vaccines will be against emerging strains of COVID-19. Major clinical trials of these vaccines preceded the identification of the variants present now in multiple countries around the world. However, real-world data show that the available vaccines work well against the B.117 variant that is most prevalent in Ontario. Preliminary studies suggest that the vaccines might be more protective against some of the variants than others.

From a practical perspective, the discovery of the variants does not change the basic recommendations for vaccination. Specifically, medical experts agree that if a vaccine is available, people should choose to receive it. And once vaccinated, please continue to adhere to public health measures including masking and regular hand washing.

### **Q9. How safe is it for pregnant women to receive the vaccine?**

Pregnant and breastfeeding women were not included in the two large studies of either the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines. However, recently published data from a registry of over 35,000 pregnant women who have received the COVID-19 vaccine did not reveal any safety concerns. Furthermore, emerging data has shown an increased risk of severe illness in pregnant women. Based on this, Ontario has recently added pregnant women to the highest risk category on the COVID-19 vaccine priority list. Furthermore, recommendations from experts and guidelines from the Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology Canada recommend that women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should be offered vaccination if they are eligible and no contraindications exist.

This decision is based on a woman's personal values and an understanding that the risk of infection and/or morbidity from COVID-19 outweighs the theorized and undescribed risk of being vaccinated during pregnancy or breastfeeding. If you are pregnant, the Ontario Ministry of Health recommends speaking to your health care provider.

### **Q10. How can I be confident about the AstraZeneca vaccine, specifically when I've heard some negative stories in the media about it?**

Vaccines are an important tool to help stop the spread of the virus and allow people to safely resume a normal life. The COVID-19 vaccine does not cause a coronavirus infection. It helps to build your immunity to the virus, so your body will fight it off more easily if it affects you. After independent and thorough scientific reviews for safety, efficacy and quality, Health Canada has approved four vaccines for use in Canada:

- Pfizer-BioNTech – approved on December 9, 2020
- Moderna – approved on December 23, 2020
- AstraZeneca – approved on February 26, 2021
- Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) – approved on March 5, 2021

The AstraZeneca vaccine is a "Viral Vector" vaccine, which uses genetically modified viruses (vectors) that are harmless to humans. Once injected into the body, the "vector" triggers an immune response without exposing you to the virus that causes COVID-19. And like all vaccines, before they are made available in Ontario, they undergo rigorous and comprehensive clinical trials to ensure they are safe and effective. The vaccines are evaluated and authorized for use by Health Canada, using rigorous standards.

The AstraZeneca vaccine has been shown to be associated with a rare (one in 100,000), but serious condition referred to as Vaccine-induced Immune Thrombotic Thrombocytopenia (VITT), leading to serious blood clots. However, when there is a high risk of exposure such as during this third wave in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the risks of developing severe COVID-19 infection leading to Intensive- Care Unit (ICU) admission are far greater.

For instance, in people in their 50s, vaccinating 200,000 people can prevent 200 admissions to ICU, but lead to one episode of a blood clot. Therefore, experts advise people to avoid waiting for other vaccines and instead, receive the first available dose. They suggest that it's better to

consider how well each of the vaccines available prevent death, hospitalizations, and serious illness – and for all vaccines, that rate is nearly 100 per cent.

For more on vaccine safety in Ontario, visit <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccine-safety#vaccine-types>.

And for other questions about your personal health and the vaccine, please speak to your health care provider.

**Q11. Why does it take four months to get the second dose of a vaccine, when people in the U.S. and other countries receive their second vaccine in a few weeks? Is there any chance of getting the vaccine sooner?**

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), a panel of experts on vaccines, continues to recommend that second doses of the COVID-19 can wait up to four months. In a comprehensive guidance document, NACI says current evidence shows that a single dose offers good protection.

In Ontario and much of Canada, the four-month interval between the first and second dose is important to enable more people to receive at least one dose of vaccine, slowing the spread of the virus. As we receive more doses of the vaccine, there might be an opportunity to receive the second dose sooner.

**Q12. What level of immunity do you have after the first dose of the vaccine? What about after the second?**

Several real-world studies have shown a single dose of vaccination to be between 60-80 per cent effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 infection. Protection after receiving two doses of mRNA vaccines is likely higher at close to 90 per cent protection. Vaccine immunity is dependent on the individual receiving the vaccine, with some people less likely to mount a strong immune response than others. Factors influencing immunity include older age, immunocompromising conditions, or chemotherapy.

**Q13. Will the COVID-19 vaccine become a yearly event?**

It is likely that further boosters of COVID-19 vaccinations will need to be given at regular intervals in order to better protect against emerging variants of the virus. It is not clear yet whether this would be an annual vaccination or for how many years.

**Q14. How do you get a vaccine?**

Currently, we are in [Phase 2](#) of the provincial plan. Vaccination of [Phase 2](#) populations will be based on age and risk factors as outlined in provincial guidance. As per Ministry of Health guidance, COVID-19 vaccinations can only be given to specific priority populations at this time. Please review the [eligibility criteria](#) carefully before booking an appointment.

The Region of Durham COVID-19 vaccination clinics are by appointment only. Residents have the option to [book a COVID-19 vaccination online](#) or by calling 1-888-444-5113. If you are currently living in an identified “Hot spot” please also visit the [Durham Region website](#) to find out where vaccination clinics are being held and how to book an appointment. For all other individuals over 30 years old who are interested in receiving the vaccine, you will need to get

your shot at a pharmacy. For locations where you can receive the a vaccine at a pharmacy visit: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/vaccine-locations>.

Please continue to check the [Durham Region website](#). As soon as more vaccines become available and more individuals from priority groups are vaccinated, more opportunities to receive a vaccine will open for younger age groups.

**Q15. What if you are older and need assistance to arrange a vaccine? What about individuals who are unable to leave their homes?**

Seniors who are able to attend a mass vaccination clinic are encouraged to do so. This will help to provide seniors with the quickest access to the vaccine. If you need assistance with transportation, [see transportation options for Durham Region COVID-19 vaccination clinics](#).

Eligible individuals 18+ unable to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at a mass immunization clinic may be able to receive the vaccine through the Health Department's mobile clinic team. Eligible individuals have difficulty accessing office-based health care services due to medical, physical, cognitive, or psychosocial needs or conditions. For more information, [view the criteria to see if you, or someone you know, can receive the COVID-19 vaccine at home](#).

**Q16. I live in Durham Region, but work in a hotspot in Toronto. Where should I go for my vaccine?**

You should attempt to get the vaccine that is available to you. If you work in one jurisdiction, but live in another, some workplaces are able to offer the vaccine. But in Durham Region, only residents aged 18 years and older, who live in the Ajax and Pickering hot spot postal code areas L1S, L1T, L1V, L1X and L1Z can book an appointment at the Ajax Community Centre hot spot pop-up clinic.

In addition to the Ajax Community Centre hot spot pop-up clinic, residents aged 45 years and older, or who will be turning 45 in 2021 and live in any of the hot spot areas can also book an appointment at the following Durham Region community mass immunization clinics:

- Ajax - Audley Recreation Centre,
- Pickering - Chestnut Hill Developments Recreation Complex Arena,
- Whitby - McKinney Centre,

Individuals aged 18 to 49-years old who live in a hot spot area must book at a hot spot pop-up clinic or attend a hot spot mobile clinic.

For more information [visit www.durham.ca/covidvaccines](http://www.durham.ca/covidvaccines). Area residents 40 and older, or who will be turning 40 in 2021, can also book appointments through participating pharmacies to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine. For information on participating Durham Region pharmacies see <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/vaccine-locations>.

**Q17. If someone tested positive for COVID-19, can they still go and receive their vaccine if they have an appointment?**

If you have COVID-19 you should not attend the clinic. You should be following the required self-isolation requirements. Contact the vaccine clinic and follow their instructions.

**Q18. I have received my first dosage of AstraZeneca from a pharmacy. How and when should I book my follow-up appointment for my second vaccine?**

If you schedule your appointment through the [provincial online vaccine booking system](#), you will need to book appointments for both doses together to make sure you get the second dose at the right time.

Other locations may give you instructions on scheduling your second appointment when you get your first dose. For some vaccine locations, you must bring your receipt from the first dose to your second appointment. Make sure to check the requirements where you get vaccinated.

**Q19. Can I mix the vaccines? For instance, if I receive my first dose of AstraZeneca, may I choose to get a Moderna vaccine for my second dose?**

Currently, medical experts do not recommend mixing vaccines. However, there are ongoing studies investigating the safety and efficacy of mixing vaccine types. In the future, it may be necessary to receive a different type of booster vaccine than you received for your primary series.

**Q20. Any plans to vaccinate individuals who are unable to work from home sooner or is this set in the provincial rollout? What about family members who are essential workers, but not listed as a member of the priority population, what can they do?**

Durham Region continues to follow Provincial direction on prioritization and [Ontario's COVID-19 vaccination plan](#). Durham Region does not have the authority to grant exceptions and Durham's ability to vaccinate residents is dependent on the supply of vaccines.

Those who are currently ineligible for the vaccine are encouraged to continue to practice recommended public health measures to prevent COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status.

**Q21. When will child daycare workers be vaccinated?**

Vaccination for child daycare workers has not yet started. Information about how these groups can access their vaccine will be posted on the [Durham Public Health website](#) when available.

**Q22. What is the rollout plan for the lower ages (30-40 years old) to receive the vaccine?**

Ontario has a [three-phase plan](#) that prioritizes vaccines for those at greatest risk of severe illness and those who care for them. As vaccine supply is delivered across the province, public health units may have different vaccine administration rates based on local context.

Currently, the age group of 30-39, falls into Phase 3 of Ontario's vaccination plan. Individuals who are 30 years of age are eligible to [book an AstraZeneca vaccine at select pharmacies](#) and primary care providers.

Details about Phase 3 timing, who is eligible and the status of completed vaccinations is on the [Province of Ontario's website](#).

**Q23. What is the percent of elderly people that have been vaccinated?**

In Durham Region, there have been over 173,000 vaccines administered (as of April 26). The first phase of the rollout focused on residents and caregivers of Long-Term Care homes and

retirement homes, as well as front-line health care workers. Right now, the vaccination roll-out is targeting the 60+ age group, and those 18+ in hot spot areas throughout the community.

## **Lakeridge Health COVID-19 Response**

### **Q24. How is Lakeridge Health doing with regards to COVID-19 in the Intensive-Care Unit (ICU) and hospital overall?**

Lakeridge Health has a comprehensive plan and numerous processes in place to manage a potential surge of patients.

During Wave 3, along with our surge planning processes firmly established, Lakeridge Health is also part of a larger structure called the Incident Management System (IMS) East Region. This group makes daily decisions to ensure capacity and staff to care for COVID-19 patients across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), including Durham Region.

### **Q25. If patients need to be transferred out of Lakeridge Health, what hospitals are they going to? How do you decide which patients are being transferred?**

To ensure that Lakeridge Health has the capacity and resources to handle urgent and emergent health care situations, patients may need to be transferred out of the hospital to other facilities that have space and capacity. With patient safety top of mind, these decisions entail a rigorous process that evaluates a patient's current and projected health care needs. These decisions are made in collaboration with the team of medical professionals at Lakeridge Health and at the receiving hospital.

### **Q26. How is Lakeridge Health supporting frontline team members?**

The psychological, mental, and physical wellness of Lakeridge Health team members continues to be a top priority. We acknowledge the stress and anxiety the pandemic has created for many team members. To assist our team members during this time, we continue to offer several supports and services. And through our *Healthy Workplace* initiative, we provide mindfulness and resilience-building resources and a peer support program.

### **Q27. Does the hospital have enough personal protective equipment (PPE)?**

The inventory of personal protective equipment (PPE) is monitored and tracked daily. Currently, Lakeridge Health has sufficient PPE stock and supply to enable Lakeridge Health team members to perform their jobs safely.

### **Q28. Why are you cancelling elective surgeries? How will we get caught up?**

As of April 16, 2021, following provincial directives and guided by our surge capacity plans, Lakeridge Health began temporarily stopping all non-urgent and non-emergency services, including non-urgent/non-emergency surgeries.

In doing so, we are protecting our ability to provide urgent and emergency care. Emergency surgeries will continue, as well as prioritized time-sensitive surgeries, such as cancer surgeries. We know this is disruptive for many people. We are assessing our capacity needs daily and are hopeful we can resume these services soon.

**Q29. What if I'm experiencing symptoms that are concerning? Can I still receive care?**

Our Emergency Department (ED) is open 24/7 for all emergency and urgent situations. If you or a loved one needs this type of care, please do not delay head to the closest ED. At Lakeridge Health, we have EDs at Ajax Pickering, Oshawa, Bowmanville and Port Perry Hospitals.

If your situation is not urgent or life or limb-threatening, but you are concerned, Lakeridge Health and its ED physicians and nurses, in collaboration with Durham primary care partners, is now offering a virtual urgent care clinic to provide you with timely access to an emergency department physician right from your Wi-Fi-enabled computer or smartphone device.

To access the Durham Virtual Urgent Care Clinic, please visit [durhamvirtualurgentcare.lh.ca](https://durhamvirtualurgentcare.lh.ca).

**Q30. How can retired nurses assist in the COVID-19 response at Lakeridge Health?**

To alleviate some of the staffing pressures because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lakeridge Health has implemented several measures, including sourcing retired clinical staff to temporarily come back to service. If you are a retired registered nurse in good standing, please check the [careers section on our website](#).