Dear Leadership,

COVID-19 Highlight of the Week: Part Two: Children’s Vaccines (5-11 years)

On Friday, November 19th, 2021 Health Canada approved the use of the pediatric Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 5-11. While Health Canada has a very rigorous scientific review system for the approval of any vaccine it is important to address some of the key questions that leadership, parents and community members have been asking.

Why should children (5-11 years) get the COVID-19 vaccine? Is it safe?

Vaccinating children and youth will provide a strong level of protection against COVID-19 and the Delta variant. Having children vaccinated will also support a safer school environment. Children receiving the vaccine will also help protect others in the family (those under five and more vulnerable elderly family members).

Vaccination is a very personal choice and it is important to make informed decisions. Experts including those at Health Canada have indicated that the pediatric vaccine is safe, works, and meets the highest manufacturing and quality standards. There is no evidence that any vaccines, including COVID-19, affect your ability to have children in the future.
Will children receive the same dosage of the COVID-19 vaccine? What is the dose interval?

Children aged 5-11 will receive a distinct pediatric Pfizer formulation. This is a lower dose vaccine of one-third the amount given to individuals aged 12 and over, in a two-dose series. A smaller needle will be used.

On Nov. 19, the Public Health Agency of Canada released guidance from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommending a dosing interval of eight weeks.

Are there enough doses for every child?

Ontario is expected to receive 1,076,000 doses of the pediatric Pfizer vaccine in the first shipment from the federal government, which will be enough to provide a first dose to every eligible child.

Where will children be able to get the vaccine?

Pediatric COVID-19 booking appointments have already begun through the Ontario COVID-19 vaccination portal or by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900.

Families can also book directly through public health units that use their own booking systems, First Nation-led vaccination clinics and participating pharmacies.

Indigenous Affairs Ontario has recommended that First Nation Communities work through the Public Health Units in their area to determine readiness for pediatric administration.

Please click on links below within Provincial and Federal Highlights for additional information on vaccine bookings, information for parents and NACI recommendations.

Will children receive proof that they are vaccinated?

Yes. Vaccine certificates with QR codes will be available for children aged 5-11 if information is entered into the provincial booking system. At this time there are no requirements for children to show proof of vaccination in Ontario.

Will parents or caregivers need to provide consent?

Parents or substitute decision makers will usually have to provide consent on behalf of their child at the time of the appointment or fill out a paper consent form for their child.
SUMMARY COVID-19 HIGHLIGHTS: NOVEMBER 22nd to NOVEMBER 26th

Provincial Developments:

- Ontario reported 927 new infections of COVID-19 on Nov 26th, the highest daily case count since September 4th.
- The Ontario government has extended COVID-19 emergency orders under the Reopening Ontario Act until March 2022.
- COVID-19 vaccine bookings have opened for all children aged 5 to 11 in Ontario. So far, more than 110,000 appointments have been booked with nearly 8,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine administered.
- Ontario has released information to parents who have questions about the pediatric vaccine for their young children.
- Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Moore dismissed suggestions that Ontario is in its fifth wave. He indicated the recent increase in cases appears to be a continuation of the fourth wave experienced in September.
- Dr. Moore also confirmed the government is not considering extending the province’s vaccine certificate rules to children aged 11 and under.
- Premier Ford confirmed the Ontario Provincial Police are investigating a cybersecurity breach at the provincial vaccine portal. He and the Solicitor-General have expressed “confidence in the booking system.”
- A recent report released by Public Health Ontario showed “there is evidence that vaccines reduce symptomatic infection, the severity of illness, as well as transmission.” PHO found that there were 17,596 breakthrough cases among the more than 11 million Ontarians who are fully vaccinated. Of those, 83 people under the age of 60 were hospitalized with a breakthrough case of COVID-19 and only nine requiring treatment in an intensive care unit.

Federal Developments:

- The Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health released a statement welcoming the National Advisory Committee on Immunization’s recommendations on the use of pediatric vaccines in COVID-19 vaccination programs.
- In relation to the Omicron COVID-19 variant Health Minister Duclos and Transport Minister Alghabra announced a travel ban for foreign nationals that have travelled to Southern Africa in the last 14 days and mandatory testing and quarantine requirement for all Canadians entering into Canada that have travelled to Southern Africa in the last 14 days.
- Global Affairs Canada will issue a travel advisory that advises against travel to Southern Africa.
- Finance Minister Freeland introduced Bill C-2 in Parliament to implement targeted COVID-19 supports. She also confirmed that the federal government “will release some form of fiscal update this fall.”
- Labour Minister O’Reagan and Justice Minister Lametti announced the government has introduced amendments to the Criminal Code to enhance protections for health care workers and people’s access to health services.