

**COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution
Secretariat**

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**Secrétariat de la distribution des
vaccins contre la COVID-19**

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<By email>

March 31, 2021

Bryan Keshen
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Provincial Network on Developmental Services

Lorrie Heffernan
Co-Chair, Vaccine Working Group
Provincial Network on Developmental Services

c/o GGladstone@reena.org

Dear Bryan Keshen and Lorrie Heffernan:

Thank you for your letter to Dr. Williams on March 3 regarding the need to prioritize COVID-19 vaccination for individuals with developmental disabilities living in congregate care settings and their caregivers. It has been forwarded to us for response.

We understand how difficult the pandemic has been and that COVID-19 is continuing to have significant impact on individuals with developmental disabilities and their caregivers, who are facing unique and heightened challenges during this time and who may be at greater risk of exposure to or serious illness from COVID-19.

We want to assure you that Ontario recognizes the vulnerability of this population and the benefit to move quickly to vaccination as the vaccine supply increases. As you may have seen in the government's [announcement](#) on March 5, they have been prioritized for vaccination in two priority groups – individuals in high-risk congregate living settings and individuals with health conditions – and will be eligible to receive vaccines beginning in April 2021, depending on availability of vaccines.

Phase Two of the vaccination rollout will focus on vaccinating the population based on age and risk to further prevent COVID-19 deaths, hospitalizations and transmission.

Individuals living in the following congregate settings are eligible to receive vaccines in Phase Two.

- Supportive housing
- Developmental services / intervenor and supported independent living (SIL)
- Emergency homeless shelters
- Other homeless populations not in shelters
- Mental health and addictions congregate settings (e.g., supportive housing, hospital psychiatric patients)
- Homes for special care
- Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters and Anti-Human Trafficking (AHT) residents
- Children's residential facilities
- Youth justice facilities
- Indigenous healing and wellness
- Provincial and demonstration schools
- On-farm temporary foreign workers
- Bail-beds and Indigenous bail beds
- Adult correctional facilities

One essential caregiver for each individual in the following congregate care settings will also be vaccinated as part of the Phase Two rollout. Essential caregivers are those identified through an organization's caregiver definition, or where no policy or definition is in place, assumes primary individuals providing direct, frequent and sustained in-person personal care and/or assistance with activities of daily living to a resident of a congregate living setting.

Essential caregivers will be vaccinated at the same time as residents and staff in these settings using a programmatic approach.

- Developmental services
- Mental health and addictions congregate settings
- Homes for special care
- Children's residential facilities
- And Indigenous healing and wellness

Additionally, individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities are eligible to receive vaccines in Phase Two as individuals with high-risk health conditions.

The government has been working closely with public health units and hospitals, who are playing a critical role in the vaccine rollout. Public health units and local health care partners have worked together to develop an integrated regional vaccine plan, which includes how people will access the vaccine, and are responsible for sub-prioritizing within the identified priority populations in line with Ontario's [ethical framework](#) and COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan and priority population risk matrix.

The government is enabling local public health units to make considerations about vaccine administration based on their local circumstances. This means that vaccination rollout phases will be continuous and overlapping. Each region will make independent decisions on when it is able to vaccinate each priority population and may not be aligned with decisions of other regions.

Many factors play a role in determining when each geographical area begins vaccinating each priority group, including federal procurement, Health Canada approvals of vaccines, and individual public health unit's specific circumstances, capacity and population needs.

Public health units are collaborating with congregate care settings, as well as primary care and specialist health service providers to ensure they will be ready to administer vaccines during Phase Two. More information will be made available to congregate care settings, doctors and to the public as the Phase Two rollout continues and as they prepare to vaccinate individuals with high risk health conditions.

At that time, primary care physicians and specialists will be able to assist individuals with health conditions in booking a vaccine appointment and public health units will have more information on when congregate care settings can be scheduled for vaccination.

For questions about when individuals with developmental disabilities and their caregivers can receive vaccines for their unique circumstances, they should contact their primary care and specialist health service providers and the public health unit in their area. To find a local public health unit, please visit the [Public Health Unit Locator](#).

Thank you for taking the time to write. We know it's been a difficult time for Ontarians and urge everyone to continue to stay the course and follow public health measures to protect themselves and keep their families, friends and communities safe.

To stay informed about Ontario's vaccination plan, please visit the [Ontario COVID-19 website](#).

Sincerely,

COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force Secretariat

- c. The Honourable Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
The Honourable Todd Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services