

Niagara to begin vaccinating frontline child care and education workers over April Break ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Through guidance from Niagara's Community Coordination Taskforce for COVID-19 Vaccination, child care, elementary and secondary school sectors have been prioritized for COVID-19 vaccination in Niagara region.

Beginning April 9, frontline staff in the following roles, who are unable to work from home, will be able to book a vaccine appointment:

- Teachers and educators, including occasional supply teachers who are actively working in-person and/or who backfill teachers who are absent because of potential COVID-19 exposures
- Early childhood educators, including those who provide coverage within either or both childcare and elementary school sectors.
- Licensees, employees and students on educational placement working in licensed childcare centres
- Licensed home childcare and in-home service providers
- Custodial, cafeteria and administrative staff
- Bus drivers and monitors

Eligible workers will be vaccinated at Niagara Health's immunization clinic at the Seymour Hannah Recreation Complex in St. Catharines, and will receive detailed booking instructions from their employer.

- Early prioritization of child care, elementary and secondary school sectors for vaccination was based on a number of risk factors:
- Risk of exposure to infection, as many children experience asymptomatic infections which make them difficult to diagnose
- Risk of transmission within a congregate environment (including transportation to school and in-class learning)
- Risk of disruption to in-person learning, which is critical to the mental, behavioural and developmental health of children.
- Risks of long-term effects from COVID-19 in children, including rare but serious cases of inflammatory syndrome, remains unclear and therefore it is important to vaccinate those who may transmit illness to children.

Closures also disrupt critical school-based services such as immunization, school meals, mental health and psychosocial support and present greater harms for children living in poverty and children with disabilities. In addition, child care and schools support parents with reliable and safe care so that they can continue to work.

Since early last spring, Niagara has seen several COVID-19 outbreaks within child care and schools, which has placed pressures on local health and public health services. As of April 6, 2021, 23.3% of current outbreaks are associated with child care or school settings.

Vaccinating this population will also ensure ongoing capacity to focus resources on vaccination rollout, instead of contact tracing, outbreak management and providing care for those in hospital.

The decision was made at the Task Force's April 1 meeting, where members provided input into the prioritization for populations included in the second phase of the Province's vaccination plan.

Over 1,500 education staff in Niagara who directly support students with special needs were vaccinated in late March.

Since January, the Task Force has provided community-wide input and advice on the rollout of the local vaccination plan.

Quotes

"Local leadership represented at the Task Force recognizes that teachers, child care workers and other education staff face unique risks in their work. Under the principle of reciprocity, we recognize the importance of prioritizing those who continue to make sacrifices to care and protect those most vulnerable in our community. In-person learning is critical to children's overall well-being and development, and we thank educators for their efforts to ensure child care (including emergency child care) and schools remain a safe place for children and youth in Niagara. This will provide another layer of protection for those who need it most." – Dr. David Dec, Community Coordination Task Force for COVID-19 Vaccination Chair

"The work of Niagara's child care and education workers is so important to the healthy development of our children, and they deserve to be vaccinated. I am pleased that the Task Force, Public Health and Niagara Health have all come together in a community-wide effort to deliver vaccines to those who need them in our community." – Regional Chair Jim Bradley

"Niagara Health is pleased to be able to get a head start on vaccinating this priority group at our Seymour Hannah clinic. Workers in the child care, elementary and secondary school sectors have a critical role in the health and wellbeing of our community. We are planning for vaccinations of these essential workers over the course of next week, which will take place alongside vaccinations of other priority groups." – Lynn Guerriero, Niagara Health President and Interim CEO

"Schools are microcosms of the community, and we know that we are not immune to being affected by community cases. Through the consistent and persistent efforts of our staff in observing COVID safety measures in schools, we have been fortunate to have had only a few outbreaks in our schools this year. However, we recognize how easy it is to transmit COVID-19, especially the new variants of concern. We are very grateful to Niagara's Vaccine Task Force for recognizing the urgency in having education workers vaccinated, so that our staff who choose to be vaccinated will be, when they return to work April 19. This is one more step towards what most of us recognize as a normal school year, hopefully in September." - Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education, Niagara Catholic District School Board.

"Vaccinating staff who work in our schools means that another layer of safety and protection is there for students, staff, and their families, and we're very grateful for that. Safety has always been our greatest priority, and we're thankful to Niagara Region Public Health and Niagara Health for making this decision and recognizing the essential role that DSBN staff have in the community." – Warren Hoshizaki, Director of Education, District School Board of Niagara.

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