

Be Prepared for Potential Challenges Ahead

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Last week's article explained bivalent vaccines, including the fact that they are being reviewed by Health Canada. If you missed it, click [here](#) for more context. If and when these vaccines are approved, there will likely be a vaccine rollout campaign similar to what we had in 2021.

There may be some challenges ahead related to the supply of vaccines. Additionally, the removal of mass immunization infrastructure can limit our access to in-person healthcare. This article will discuss each of these challenges and how we can be prepared.

Supply of Vaccines

In the 2021 vaccine rollout, Ontario faced mass shortages of both the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the Moderna vaccine. As a result, many people had to get their second dose from a different company than their first dose, or they delayed getting their second dose for months rather than mix and match. Also, the capacity of vaccine clinics was greatly reduced, and cases continued to rise.

According to Global News, Canada's chief health officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, says that supply is "one of the key considerations for rollout of any new COVID-19 vaccine [and] this is something Canadian health officials still don't know anything about with any of the proposed new vaccines from various manufacturers." Dr. Tam shares that this fact "makes it unclear whether a fall rollout of any new vaccine could be possible."

Patricia Gauthier, president and general manager for Moderna Canada, assures that supply issues should not be an issue this time around. She said that the company "was not equipped with a global supply chain for its products at that time, so it had to ramp up its operations to meet global demand." "I think now we're in a position where we do have very high capacity for manufacturing," Gauthier said.

Pfizer has also learned from its struggles with supply chain issues, and has released a statement on what it has learned from distributing COVID-19 vaccines. Also, Pfizer won the 2022 Supply Chain Award for its innovative ways of managing these issues.

Although there is not much that we can do individually to prepare for issues related to the supply of vaccines, it's good to be aware that both companies seem to be in a better position to face this challenge.

Mass Immunization Clinic Infrastructure & Access to In-Person Healthcare

In 2021, there were multiple mass immunization clinics across the province. Once a certain percentage of the population was vaccinated, the number of these clinics reduced and the approach changed to targeting specific neighbourhoods and communities with low vaccination rates.

Infectious disease expert Dr. Isaac Bogoch notes, “One of the challenges is that in much of the country, a lot of the infrastructure for mass vaccination was removed.”*

He anticipates that, this fall, there could be three vaccine rollouts happening at the same time: a bivalent booster dose rollout, a COVID-19 vaccine rollout for kids younger than six, and the annual flu shot rollout.*

Part of the targeted approach includes having more doctors and nurses work as vaccinators.

Dr. Bogoch explains, “Vaccines are mostly now administered in traditional venues like primary care clinics and public health clinics and pharmacies.”* When referring to the other vaccine rollouts, he predicts, “it’s probably going to be a very busy time.”*

“You have to scale up and it often takes people away from their day-to-day work, it takes physicians away from their patients and nurses and other precious staff away from health care,” says infectious disease specialist Dr. Zain Chagla.*

As a result, there may continue to be reduced access to other forms of healthcare, such as in-person walk-in clinics and doctor’s visits. This is on top of the current shortage of healthcare workers, including nurses, across the province.

Telemedicine Healthcare Options

1) Call 811 or the Toll-Free TTY line: 1-866-797-0007.

Note: You must have a TTY device to use this number. If you use Bell Relay TTY Service, or Canada Video Relay Service (VRS), please contact their standard phone lines.*

When you call 811, a registered nurse will be available to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.* Assistance is offered in English, French and other languages.* 811 is free, secure, confidential, and available to everyone in Ontario.*

When you call 811, your call will be received by an advisor who will securely and confidentially collect basic information and the reason for your call.* You will then be transferred to a Registered Nurse who will tell you about your options for next steps.*

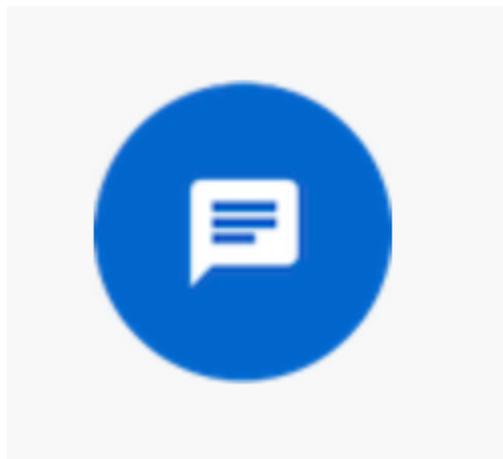
Click [here](#) to learn more about calling 811.

2) Use the 811 chat.

If you would rather type instead of speak, you can use the 811 online chat. At any time during the chat session, you can enter your phone number and ask them to call you back.* Combining chat with a phone call can be helpful if you or a caretaker want to verbally discuss some parts of your concern.*

Although they will ask for your name at the beginning of each chat session, you can also choose to remain anonymous.*

To begin the chat, click [here](#) and then look for the blue speech bubble button on the bottom right of your screen.* Once you see it, click on it to start the chat. It will look like this picture:



Before you begin, you will be asked a few questions so that they can direct your call to the most appropriate staff member.*

When you use the online chat, you will first interact with one of the Health Care Navigators at Health Connect Ontario who will try to give you the advice you need.*

If you are experiencing symptoms or your question is best responded to by a nurse, the Health Care Navigator will transfer you to a Registered Nurse to continue the chat.*

Click [here](#) to learn more about using the 811 chat.

3) Rapid Access to Telemedicine

If you are covered by OHIP, you can contact a doctor in Ontario through a service called Rapid Access to Telemedicine. You can call them at 1-855-629-0365 or text them at 647-372-0365.

This service is open 365 days per year from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Click [here](#) to learn more and get connected with this service.

Final Thoughts

There may be some challenges with this fall's rollouts for bivalent vaccines, vaccines for young children, and the flu shot. It seems that supply will not be as much of an issue as it was in the past, but the removal of mass immunization infrastructure in addition to the province-wide shortage of healthcare workers could lead to limited access to in-person healthcare.

The resources mentioned above are good to know before things escalate so that we can be prepared for these challenges ahead.

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at www.ontario.ca/coronavirus. Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675