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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New COVID-19 Immunization Clinic to open for priority individuals in Simcoe Muskoka

SIMCOE MUSKOKA - A COVID-19 Immunization Clinic is expected to open in Barrie imminently to begin immunizing prioritized individuals against COVID-19. The exact date is dependent on delivery of the vaccine.

The centre, which is a partnership between the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU), Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre (RVH) and the City of Barrie, will be located in the current RVH COVID-19 Testing and Assessment Centre on Sperling Drive and will serve all Simcoe County and Muskoka District.

SMDHU nurses will administer the vaccine to a limited number of prioritized people beginning with long-term care health care workers. The vaccine will not be broadly available to the general public until sometime in 2021 and it is expected it will take another six to nine months to immunize all Ontarians who opt to get the vaccine.

“This is wonderful news for all of us and cause for real optimism, but it is a complex endeavour,” said Dr. Charles Gardner, SMDHU’s medical officer of health. “It will take some time for us, working together with our partners, to roll out mass immunization for all of our residents who want it.”

“In the meantime it is critical that we don’t let our guard down,” he said. “We must continue to practice those public health measures that will keep us and our loved ones safe until we are all able to be vaccinated. Wear a mask, physically distance from those outside our households, wash your hands frequently, stay home if sick and get tested for COVID-19 if you have symptoms, are still critical to reducing and preventing transmission of the virus.”

An initial allocation of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will soon be distributed to Simcoe Muskoka, with more to arrive in the weeks ahead. At this time it will only be offered by invitation and appointment to priority groups, which include:

- Residents, staff, essential caregivers, and other employees of congregate living settings (e.g. long-term care homes and retirement homes) that provide care for seniors as they are at higher risk of infection and serious illness from COVID-19;
- Health care workers, including hospital employees, other staff who work or study in hospitals, and other health care personnel;
- Adults in Indigenous communities, including remote communities where risk of transmission is high; and

- Adult recipients of chronic home health care.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, approved by Health Canada on December 9 and supported to be safe and effective by very robust scientific data and evidence, must be stored at temperatures below -70C which RVH has the infrastructure to support. As additional vaccines are approved by Health Canada, vaccination and distribution will be expanded.

“This is the most significant and complex immunization effort in modern medicine, and although the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine is an important milestone, the distribution of the COVID vaccine is extremely complex,” said Janice Skot, RVH’s president and chief executive officer. “Although hospital workers have been identified as a priority population, limited availability of the Pfizer vaccine means that hospital staff and physicians won’t be vaccinated until January. But after a tough nine months, there’s hope that our lives can begin to get back to normal in late-2021.”

The Immunization Clinic will share the same building, but separate space, with RVH’s COVID-19 Testing and Assessment Centre, with 24/7 security on site.

“The city is proud to partner with the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and the Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre to help house the COVID-19 Immunization Clinic,” said Barrie Mayor Jeff Lehman. “It is quite remarkable how quickly everyone has worked together to be in a position to start this important vaccination. This will be the most critical step that we have all been waiting for in ending the pandemic and allowing us to return to our normal lives. Our community is grateful for all that our front line workers have done, and all they will continue to do as the vaccine is rolled out.”

For more information, visit the health unit’s COVID-19 [Vaccine and Immunization web page](#) or call Health Connection to speak with a public health professional weekdays 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturdays 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 705-721-7520 (1-877-721-7520). More information about the vaccine and immunization can also be found at [ontario.ca](#).