

CPO, stakeholders work on plan for construction vaccine clinics

Don Wall May 7, 2021



Construction stakeholders from across the province are working with Ontario's Chief Prevention Officer Ron Kelusky to hammer together a plan to install COVID-19 vaccination clinics at two or more construction workplaces.

EllisDon would host a clinic at its offices in Mississauga and Modern Niagara's headquarters in Vaughan would be the site for a second clinic if multiple issues can be worked out, Kelusky said May 6, with representatives of the Ottawa Construction Association and other firms in Ontario also involved in discussions to co-ordinate plans with local public health authorities.

"I think all parties want to see this rollout of the vaccine, both to essential workers and the public, be as smooth and as convenient as possible. If this plan fits within that objective, then I think we're good to go," said Kelusky, noting there are planning meetings taking place every day.

“It’s really just getting all the players in a room and sorting out the priorities, and making sure of the availability of the vaccinations, that it’s integrated and part of a plan and that all of the resources and protocols that are necessary to set something up are followed.”

Kelusky suggested that EllisDon is a logical participant given its huge workforce and that it has been the province’s lead participant in rapid testing of workers. EllisDon conducts 14,000 tests a week to screen workers at the start of shifts, out of the province’s weekly total of 20,000, the CPO said.

Andrew Pariser, vice-president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON), one of several stakeholder groups that have been collaborating with Kelusky on the plan, explained, “Builders actively participating in the rapid testing program would be ideal candidates for onsite vaccination clinics as they have the program infrastructure set up to safely and effectively administer vaccines to front-line construction workers. A worker could be vaccinated using the same program used for rapid testing.”

EllisDon and the Ottawa Construction Association did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In addition to RESCON, Kelusky cited executives with the Ontario General Contractors Association (OGCA), the Building Industry and Land Development Association, the Council of Ontario Construction Associations (COCA) and the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario as frequent consultants who encouraged Kelusky to ensure that construction workers were given a priority spot within the province’s phased vaccine rollout. Most construction workers are in Group 2 of the second phase of the vaccination plan, with May 10 now designated as the first day that Group 2 workers are eligible to register to be vaccinated.

There are other designations of individuals eligible for vaccines, including people living in “hot spots,” and now the Region of Peel is permitting all residents 18 and older to apply. On May 5 the government announced the launch of mobile vaccine units for small to medium-sized businesses in hot spot communities and outlined an expanded list of large businesses that are confirmed to host vaccination clinics.

“Certainly as things are loosening up, there is greater interest on being able to get priority groups put together, find spaces in hot areas where businesses and the local public health can collaborate, to be able to get both,” Kelusky said, referring to the increased availability of vaccines in the province. “It’s a win-win. You can get some of the construction workers that live in a community like Peel and you can offer a place for residents to get inoculated.”

COCA president Ian Cunningham said the approach would get Ontario to herd immunity more quickly and possibly allow the sector to enjoy “something close to a normal summer season.”

Cunningham singled out the efforts of Kelusky on the initiative, saying he is a “true champion of the industry.”

David Frame, director of government relations for the OGCA, noted the association sent out a message to its members on May 4 discussing the clinic plan and there was immediate response.

“Some of our members are already coming forward to us. They would be interested in hosting a vaccine clinic, so we’re working on putting that in order,” Frame said.

Kelusky remarked that “pop-up” clinics actually require substantial planning and negotiation not only with the provincial government and local health authorities but also authorities such as the province’s pandemic advisory committee and chief coroner Dr. Dirk Huyer, who is serving as the government’s testing lead. It will be important to ensure that construction sector clinics are co-ordinated with the provincial plan.

And everything is subject to vaccine availability, Kelusky noted.

“It’s been a good undertaking as far as I’m concerned, it just demonstrates that construction is a big part of the community and wants to be part of the community.”