

Primed to give shots, despite lack of notice

Ready, willing and able, pharmacists say

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DOCTORS and pharmacists reassured the public they will be ready to administer COVID-19 shots, one day after being caught by surprise by the province's announcement that vaccines would be shipped to them imminently.

Ryan Chan, owner of Exchange District Pharmacy on McDermot Avenue, said he has been allocated 100 shots.

"We are anticipating getting the shots Friday or Monday. So we're booking appointments for Tuesday."

Chan said, unlike the annual flu shot campaign, a lot more questions must be asked to determine who qualifies for the vaccine at this time.

"This one is a lot longer," he said. "Manitoba Health provides us with the distribution and the requirements... It is all about trying to be fair."

A provincial spokesman said a video call would be held Thursday night in which Dr. Joss Reimer, medical lead of the province's vaccination task force, would answer questions from physicians and pharmacists about the AstraZeneca vaccine, which they will administer.

"Allocations of this vaccine to pharmacies and medical clinics was based on a variety of factors such as their health region, historic flu vaccination volume and capacity-related factors obtained from the respective site," the spokesman said.

"Vaccine age eligibility continues to evolve and move downward. However, age restrictions are in place for this pilot project rollout: general population 50 to 64 and 30 to 64 for First Nations people, with priority given to those with one or more medical condition(s) from the list, or those 18 to 64 who are already eligible."

The province announced on Wednesday that the AstraZeneca vaccine was available, and it put out an eligibility list as well as a map showing the medical clinics and pharmacies that would have it. The province did that before clinic staff had been told what to tell patients.



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Ryan Chan, owner of Exchange District Pharmacy on McDermot Avenue, says he has been allocated 100 shots. He says the vaccines require many questions to determine who qualifies.

On Wednesday, Doctors Manitoba spokesman Keir Johnson said that sparked a lot of confusion. One day later, Johnson said it's a matter of explaining to Manitobans who is eligible for the vaccine. Doctors are getting a lot of calls from seniors who wonder why they are left out.

"We've heard from people who are 65 to 79 and who also have the (medical) conditions on the priority list," he said. "They feel it is unfair, but we are telling them it is because of who can get the different vaccine products."

"It is all complicated and that's what makes it difficult for people to understand."

Currently, Manitobans aged 80 and older, or are First Nations people 60 and older, are able to get either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines at specialized clinics set up by the province. On Wednesday the province announced AstraZeneca would be available to Manitobans aged 50 to 64, and First Nations people aged 30 to 64, as long as they also have a high-risk condition on a priority list. That list includes including Down syndrome, end-stage kidney disease, severe COPD, cystic fibrosis, or severe obesity with a body mass index equal to or greater than 40.

Health officials have said the AstraZeneca vaccine wasn't tested on enough

seniors by the manufacturer to get safety information so most health regulators around the world recommend it only be given to people under the age of 65.

Johnson said seniors left out of current vaccine priorities will get vaccinated soon.

"I think it is just a couple of months of really challenging guidelines, but then we should have enough supply by May or June for everybody to get them," he said.

Bhargav Desai, manager of Peguis Pharmacy at 1065 Portage Ave., said they'll get 50 doses soon.

"We will take appointments based on

the prioritization," said Desai.

"We've had people asking for it since (Wednesday). I'm letting people know if they don't qualify. We've been getting many calls."

Meanwhile, Chan said while he'll be ready to begin giving the vaccine to people, there's one person he knows who qualifies who hasn't got it yet: himself.

"I personally have not had my shot yet. I just need to find the time to get out to get it," he said chuckling.

"I'm hoping to get it before next week."

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