

# Niagara County Department of Health prioritizing mass vaccination clinics to increase access to COVID-19 vaccine

The Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH) announced the start of point-of-dispensing (POD) operations to provide COVID-19 vaccination to eligible persons as defined by New York state.

“We will be prioritizing POD drive-thru operations as a key focus for our staff and volunteer efforts,” Public Health Director Daniel J. Stapleton said. “All POD sites are drive-thru operations, preregistration only, and scheduled on a week-to-week basis based on vaccine availability and NYS phases.”

For each phase, the NCDOH sends preregistration information via multiple communication channels to targeted distribution groups. As the phases expand to include general population, preregistration information will be made more publicly available on the NCDOH website: <https://www.niagaracounty.com/health/Services/Public-Health-Preparedness/2019-Novel-Coronavirus-COVID-19/COVID-19-Vaccination>.

“POD operations require a significant number of staff, in concert with volunteers and partner support,” stated Elise Pignatoro, director of public health planning and emergency preparedness. “The community can play an important role by following key isolation and quarantine actions, while we work to ensure a safe, efficient and equitable vaccination campaign is available to

Active coronavirus cases in Niagara County, as of Wednesday afternoon. (Image and numbers courtesy of the New York state and Niagara County health departments.

our community members.”

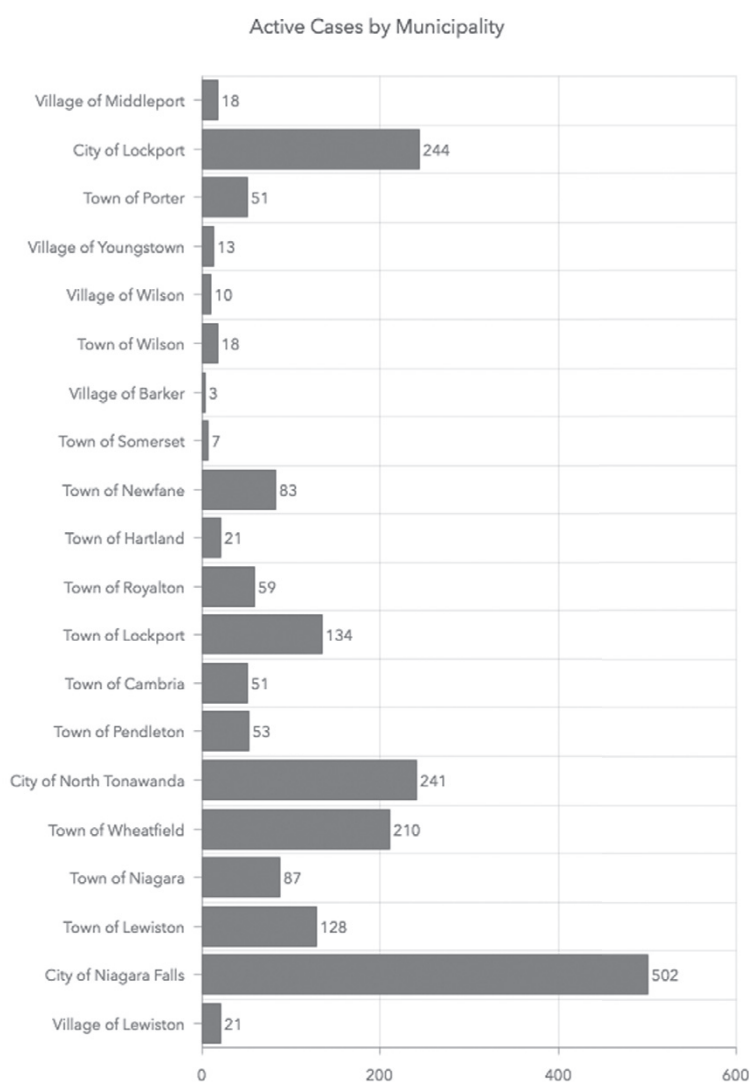
While cases continue to rise in Niagara County and surrounding areas, the NCDOH is asking the community to remain vigilant and play an important part in reducing community transmission of COVID-19. Niagara County reported 288 new coronavirus cases on Tuesday – 9.2% of the 3,133 people tested.

“Our nurses will be staffing the POD operations to help ensure those most at-risk from the virus have access to the vaccine,” stated Laurie Schoenfeldt, nursing director. “With limited staff and the need to shift some staff from contact tracing to vaccination efforts, we urge community members to follow key actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19.”

Individuals who have been told of a positive COVID-19 test result by their physician, pharmacy, health care facility or laboratory must isolate for 10 days past the onset of symptoms, or 10 days past the date of their positive test sample collection (if no symptoms).

Key actions to take if one tests positive for COVID-19 (isolation), or has symptoms and is awaiting test results:

√ Stay home.



√ Monitor your symptoms. If you have an emergency warning sign, seek emergency medical care immediately.

√ Stay in a separate room from

other household members, if possible.

√ Use a separate bathroom, if possible.

√ Avoid contact with other

members of the household and pets.

√ Don't share personal household items such as cups, towels and utensils.

√ Wear a mask when around other people, if possible.

Mandatory quarantines are defined as close contacts (within 6 feet for at least 10 minutes regardless of wearing a mask) and household members of an individual with a positive test result.

Those who do not have symptoms must quarantine for 10 days past the last date of exposure, and continue daily symptom monitoring through day 14. Those experiencing symptoms must quarantine for 14 days. A negative diagnostic COVID-19 test does not end or shorten the quarantine period.

Key actions to take if one has been in close contact with a confirmed positive case (quarantine):

√ Stay home.

√ If symptoms develop, contact a health care provider and seek testing.

√ Watch for fever (100°F), cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID-19.

√ Stay away from others, especially people who are at higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19.

Visit the NCDOH online at <http://www.niagaracounty.com/health>.

## Niagara County approves funding for vaccination hires

The Niagara County Legislature unanimously approved a resolution Tuesday night to allocate \$101,458 from its contingency fund to create and fill part-time positions that will help administer the COVID-19 vaccine to the public when the vaccine doses become available. The county intends to vaccinate the public through point-of-dispensing sites (PODS).

Specifically, these funds will allow the county to hire three part-time/per-diem firefighter EMTs and 10 part-time/per-diem paramedic positions to assist with vaccinations. The Niagara County Health Department will

begin phase one vaccinations next Tuesday. Nursing home vaccinations are already underway through a federal program, and hospitals have begun vaccinating priority groups, as well.

“The Niagara County Departments of Health and Emergency Services have an excellent plan in place to deliver the vaccine and will utilize firefighter EMTs and paramedics from Niagara County to assist existing staff in these operations,” said Niagara County Legislature Chairwoman Becky Wydysh, who is a member of the WNY vaccination hub. “These funds allow us to hire those individuals.”

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Legislator Dave Godfrey, chairman of the Community Safety and Security Committee, said this expenditure represents half of the county's entire contingency fund for 2021.

“We were optimistic that, since New York state has been dictating so much of the vaccination

process, that they would provide funding to help implement the plan; but thus far, we have no indication that such funding is going to happen,” Godfrey said. “So, while it's a little disconcerting spending half your contingency one week into the year, the fact is there is no better use of county dollars than getting

people vaccinated.

“I will add that, as a community, we are very fortunate to have so many trained firefighter EMTs and paramedics who are willing to step into these part-time positions.”

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