



Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

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MKO Statement on the Arrival of COVID-19 Vaccines in Northern Manitoba

Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB – Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing this statement to provide an update on COVID-19 vaccines for First Nations people in Northern Manitoba.

The Moderna vaccine and the Pfizer vaccine have been approved for use across Canada to date. Both the provincial and federal governments identified First Nations people as a group that should receive the COVID-19 vaccine on a priority basis.

The Moderna vaccine is considered as more viable for use in Northern and remote communities in comparison with the Pfizer vaccine. To date, the vaccine has been distributed to seven communities in Northern Manitoba. It is being distributed to all First Nations in Manitoba as soon as possible.

“All First Nations in Manitoba have access to an initial 5300 doses of the Moderna vaccine, which are in the process of being distributed. The distribution is a complex process with many moving parts. Thanks to the advocacy of our First Nations leaders, First Nations experts have taken on a lead role in making plans for how the vaccine should be distributed. On January 7, the vaccine started being distributed to First Nations in Manitoba,” shared **Grand Chief Garrison Settee**. “I am pleased to know that seven MKO First Nations have received their initial shipment and I look forward to the day when all of the First Nations receive their first shipment of the Moderna vaccines.”

“This vaccine is safe and effective in the fight against the COVID-19 virus. It is much needed as we continue to see disproportionately high impacts from COVID-19 for First Nations across the Province of Manitoba. The median age of death for First Nations citizens is 66, compared to 83 for Manitoba. First Nations citizens currently make up 25 per cent of total COVID-19 cases, 30 per cent of hospitalizations due to COVID-19, and 45 per cent of admissions to intensive care units due to COVID-19,” stated **Dr. Michael Routledge**, medical advisor to MKO and the new health entity Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoyawin.

“In Norway House, we are extremely fortunate to have a resilient and determined crew to keep our nation afloat,” shared **Chief Larson Anderson of Norway House Cree Nation**. “The hard work from our crew helped us keep the COVID-19 virus out of our community for eight months. To date, we have had 48 positives in Norway House and in Winnipeg. We have five active cases in Winnipeg and no active ones in Norway House. Now that the vaccine has arrived in our community, we see a light at the end of the tunnel. We are encouraging everyone to continue practicing all the fundamentals that have worked for us, including wearing a mask, staying six feet apart, washing our hands, and staying home when you are sick.”

“We received 200 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine in Cross Lake. Cross Lake leadership was excited to receive the vaccine on January 7, 2021, at 5:57 pm and even more elated when our nurse Brenda Frogge from Cross Lake administered the vaccine to Councillor Mervin Garrick. Mervin met all the criteria and was the first Elder and Councillor to receive the vaccine at a First Nation reserve across Manitoba,” said **Chief David Monias of Pimicikamak Cree Nation**. “We were initially expecting to get the vaccines on February 1, so we were certainly pleased to receive the vaccines earlier than expected. We have begun vaccinating our Elders. This vaccine means we can better protect our knowledge keepers and our traditional teachers! We have designated the first batch for Elders aged 70 years and older, Elders in care homes, and staff working in the Elder’s home. We are seeking ways in which we can access more vaccines as we want to work diligently to protect all of our community members.”

“York Factory received our first shipment of the Moderna vaccine on January 8. We began vaccinating Elders age 70 years and older yesterday and we expect all Elders to receive their vaccines by the end of today,” stated **Chief Leroy Constant of York Factory First Nation**. “We have been living with this pandemic for almost one year and everyone is tired of it. We know the lockdown has a huge impact on the mental wellness of people right across the Province of Manitoba. We look forward to having access to increased numbers of vaccines as we need to work diligently to protect our citizens from this deadly virus.”

“MKO will continue to work closely with the Province of Manitoba’s COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force in an effort to get vaccines for all MKO citizens who want to receive one,” said Grand Chief Settee. “We will continue to provide updates to our community members as information becomes available. In the meantime, I encourage everyone to remain vigilant and continue practicing public health measures to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus.”

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Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. (MKO) is a non-profit, political advocacy organization that has represented 26 First Nation communities in Manitoba’s North since 1981. The MKO represents more than 72,000 First Nations people.