



Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak Inc.

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MKO Update on COVID-19 Vaccines in Northern Manitoba: Northern Chiefs Encourage Citizens to Continue Following Public Health Measures

Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB – Manitoba Keewatinowik 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 20 communities in Northern Manitoba. The first shipment of the Moderna vaccine has been distributed to nearly all First Nations in Manitoba.

“All First Nations in Manitoba have access to an initial 5300 doses of the Moderna vaccine, almost all of which have been distributed. The distribution of the vaccines to First Nations in Manitoba began on January 7. We have learned this is a complex process that is impacted by winter weather as well as outbreaks of COVID-19 in some communities,” shared **Grand Chief Garrison Settee**. “I am pleased to know that 20 MKO First Nations have received their initial shipment of the Moderna vaccines to date. I send my thanks to the First Nations experts who have worked tirelessly on the vaccine prioritization and distribution plans.”

“The 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 26 per cent of total COVID-19 cases, 44 per cent of hospitalizations, and 57 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 Minoayawin.

“Misipawistik Cree Nation is experiencing growing rates of COVID-19 in our community. We currently have 35 confirmed cases and well over 200 contacts in our community of 1400 people,” said **Chief Heidi Cook** of the **Misipawistik Cree Nation**. “The Rapid Response Team arrived in our community yesterday to do rapid testing for the virus. This is a worrisome situation as we don’t have robust health care facilities or a lot of extra spaces for people to self-isolate in our community. The Moderna vaccine does provide some hope that we can at least help protect the Elders in our community while we await more vaccines. We hope to start vaccinating our Elders on Thursday, January 21. For now, I am encouraging all citizens in our area and across the province to observe the public health measures that we need to follow to stop the spread of the virus.”

“We have been waiting and I said once I became eligible, I would get it. I planned to get it and I got it last night,” shared **Chief Clarence Easter** of the **Chemawawin Cree Nation**, explaining that he was on standby in case of a cancellation at the vaccination clinic hosted in his community. “I went in about 8:30pm last night and I got it. I’m encouraging everyone who is eligible to go for the vaccine. This virus is still very serious, it is still very dangerous.”

MKO will continue to provide updates on the COVID-19 vaccine for Northern First Nations as more information becomes available.

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