



## Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak Inc.

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For immediate release  
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### **MKO Concerned About Impact of Rising COVID-19 Cases in Northern Manitoba First Nations**

**Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB** – Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing a statement on COVID-19 in Northern Manitoba.

“A growing number of MKO First Nations are being impacted by rising rates of COVID-19,” said **Grand Chief Garrison Settee**. “As we can see from high numbers right across the Province of Manitoba, the new Omicron variant is having a major impact on Manitoba residents. I am concerned about rising COVID cases in Northern Manitoba and will meet with MKO leaders on January 7 to discuss next steps in the ongoing battle against COVID-19.”

The response to COVID-19 is evolving rapidly in the province. As of January 5, 2022, the province is shifting to providing Rapid Antigen Tests for Manitoba residents having COVID-19 symptoms who are ages 5 and older.

Results from rapid tests are not being reported in updates from the province. Public health officials announced that people who test positive on Rapid Antigen Tests are not required to do a PCR test (lab confirmation). There is a significant backlog in receiving test results from COVID-19 swabs done at testing sites.

Indigenous Services Canada has shared it is in the process of shipping 100 kits of rapid tests to each First Nation in Manitoba this week. MKO does **not** have information of how many rapid tests are being sent to each MKO First Nation.

At least 10 MKO First Nations have put travel restrictions and/or lock downs in place, as follows:

- Barren Lands First Nation (Brochet)
- Bunibonibee Cree Nation (Oxford House)
- God’s Lake First Nation (God’s Lake Narrows)
- Northlands First Nation (Lac Brochet)
- Manto Sipi Cree Nation (God’s River)
- Marcel Colomb First Nation (Lynn Lake)
- Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (Nelson House)
- Pimicikamak Cree Nation (Cross Lake)

- Sayisi Dene Denesuline Nation (Tadoule Lake)
- Tataskweyak Cree Nation (Split Lake)

Several MKO First Nations have also declared a state of emergency for their communities as case numbers rise.

“The Omicron variant has been making its way through Manitoba in an unprecedented way,” shared Grand Chief Settee. “Our leaders are working tirelessly to contain the spread of COVID-19 and ensure essential services are available to community members. I urge MKO citizens to continue to do their part to stop the transmission of COVID-19 by limiting contacts, reducing non-essential travel, and by getting vaccinated. I especially encourage MKO citizens to join me in getting their COVID-19 booster when they are eligible to receive it. Data shows that if you get the virus, you will face less severe outcomes if you have received your third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.”

MKO is concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on Manitoba’s health care system, including a reduction of health services, backlog in surgeries and diagnostic services, and the closures of health care facilities such as the recent closures in Leaf Rapids and Gillam.

“As First Nations see a surge in COVID-19 cases, MKO continues to advocate for surge support,” said Grand Chief Settee. “We know surge supports are not as robust as they were in earlier waves. It is important for MKO to ensure our communities have access to supports, however, we understand this may be a significant challenge with an overwhelmed health care system.”

MKO has been working with other First Nation organizations along with provincial and federal partners to ensure communities have access to necessary resources.

Protocols are changing fast. MKO First Nations are working to adapt. Many First Nations have implemented measures that go beyond public health orders, by implementing curfews, reducing business hours, and moving to remote work to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Some First Nations have also received the Monoclonal Antibody treatment to administer to people who are over the age of 18 and have not been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. This is a treatment option for individuals who have underlying health conditions.

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***For more information on COVID-19 in Manitoba First Nations, please see the Manitoba First Nations Pandemic Response Coordination Team’s:***

- Daily report for January 6, 2022
- Weekly bulletin for January 6, 2022