



Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

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MKO Unclear on COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Plans for Northern and Remote First Nations in Manitoba

Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB – Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing this statement to provide updates on the COVID-19 vaccine in Manitoba. MKO represents and advocates on behalf of Northern First Nations in Manitoba.

The first shipment of the vaccine arrived in Manitoba earlier this week. Health care professionals began receiving the vaccine in Winnipeg on December 16. The province has shared that there are enough doses to vaccinate about 900 people. Manitoba plans to deliver vaccines to “priority populations” as follows:

- health care workers most directly involved in the COVID-19 response;
- seniors in congregate living settings such as long-term care facilities, assisted living facilities, retirement homes, and chronic care hospitals;
- older adults starting at 80 years of age and older; and
- adults at risk in remote or isolated Indigenous communities.

Grand Chief Garrison Settee shared the following:

“Although the vaccine arrived in Manitoba earlier this week, we still have no information about when it will be distributed or made available to MKO citizens. The province has not reached out to provide me with any information about who is making these decisions and how they are being made.

Last week, we wrote to Premier Brian Pallister to advise him that we do require First Nations expertise to have a seat at the table when it comes to Manitoba’s Task Force on COVID-19. I personally have not received an invitation to provide input at the provincial level to date. We do know that initial steps were taken to engage First Nations experts from the Manitoba First Nations Pandemic Response Coordination Team.

We had also shared our concerns with Dr. Theresa Tam last week about the lack of involvement from Manitoba First Nations experts at the national level. The involvement of expertise from Manitoba is absolutely essential to ensure the vaccine rolls out in a way that considers the unique circumstances and realities of Northern and remote First Nations in our province.

As the Grand Chief for Northern First Nations, I want to encourage both the province and the federal government to maintain transparency and strive for clear communication when it comes to the vaccine distribution strategy. We continue to urge the federal and provincial governments to include us in planning for the distribution of the vaccine. We still need clarity on which adults will be deemed 'at risk' in our communities. We still do not have any information on when and where the vaccine may be available in Thompson and other Northern hubs.

Many more of our citizens are now being impacted by COVID-19. Sadly, our citizens are disproportionately impacted and there are severe outcomes for First Nations people who have COVID-19 in Manitoba. As leaders, I want to reiterate that we must work together in unity and we must do this on an urgent basis. Our citizens' lives are at stake.

Knowing there is a vaccine on the way for this deadly virus provides some much-needed hope, especially as we look to a Christmas where we are not able to gather with any loved ones who live outside of our households. Our MKO citizens need to acquire the vaccine as soon as possible.”

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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.

