



Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak Inc.

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MKO Update on COVID-19 Outbreak and Vaccines in Northern Manitoba: Mobile Crisis Response Team Available to Assist First Nations During Pandemic

Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB – Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing this statement to provide an update on COVID-19 in Northern Manitoba along with an update on vaccines. MKO is also reminding First Nations across Manitoba that the services of the Mobile Crisis Response Team remain available during the pandemic.

“The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact First Nations across the province,” shared **Grand Chief Garrison Settee**. “In the MKO region, we are aware of an outbreak in the Pimicikamak Cree Nation. We acknowledge the toll this ongoing situation is having on the mental wellness of children, youth, and families. While access to the COVID-19 vaccines absolutely provides hope for us, the number of vaccines available remains low. As we wait to see an increase in available vaccines, I want to remind First Nations that the services of our MKO Mobile Crisis Response Team are available free of charge to all Nations across the province.”

“We have an outbreak in our community, this is our third wave now. Roughly about 32 households are affected. As you know, we have a lot of overcrowding due to lack of housing in our community so when one family gets affected, the numbers are normally high because there is quite a number of people in the homes. We have been stating this for a long time. When this first started we said this is going to be devastating for First Nations in the long run because of the overcrowding and lack of housing in the community,” stated **Chief David Monias** at our weekly MKO press conference earlier today. “We have about 107 cases of COVID positives and over 300 contacts. We are still working through testing people. We have the Rapid Response Team that is helping us out, they are working from 8 o’clock in the morning to 12 o’clock midnight trying to keep up.”

“We continue to see disproportionate 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 33 per cent of hospitalizations and 55 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.

MKO is developing a strategy to provide support to young people in MKO communities in the short and longer term. In the meantime, MKO is reminding First Nations across the Province of Manitoba of the existence of the MKO Mobile Crisis Response Team.

“MKO’s Mobile Crisis Response Team provides support to all First Nations in Manitoba and our services are free,” said **Justin Courchene**, program manager for the team. “When a First Nation experiences a crisis, they can contact us toll free at **1-844-927-5433** to request our support. As much as possible, our teams are still travelling to communities when requested. We have implemented measures to do our best to keep everyone safe while we live through this pandemic. We respond to all sorts of crises and we use a trauma-informed approach to assist people of all ages. Our team has a diverse set of skills, with members based in both Thompson and Winnipeg.”

The Mobile Crisis Response Team provides critical incident debriefing, sharing circles, counselling, therapy, referrals, grief and loss support, traditional support services, and more. The team also builds capacity in First Nations by providing training to help them develop their own local crisis response teams. There is more detailed information about this service available at:

www.mkonation.com/mobile-crisis

“As for the COVID-19 vaccines, we look forward to seeing the supply increase as the year progresses,” shared Grand Chief Settee. “We expect First Nations to receive a second allotment of 5300 doses of the Moderna vaccine starting the week of February 22, although some may hear of earlier deliveries due to some vaccines being left over from pop-up vaccine clinics. We are also expecting to see larger shipments of both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines during the week of March 15, however, this date and quantities remain tentative.”

Manitoba’s COVID-19 Vaccine Implementation Task Force and sub-working groups continue to meet regularly to develop and implement the vaccine rollout plan for First Nation people of Manitoba. Last week, pop-up vaccine clinics opened in various locations throughout Manitoba. Front line First Nations health staff were invited to book appointments at these clinics, including staff from the MKO Traditional Healers, Mobile Crisis, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Teams—this is a reflection of the essential frontline services these staff provide to First Nations.

“We expect the Vaxport Thompson airport vaccination site to open on March 1 with final preparations being made for this site,” shared Grand Chief Settee. “Engagement sessions have started with MKO First Nations and communities that will be invited to access this site. MKO will assist the province with opening this supersite in a good way. We will continue to share updates as we get closer to the opening date. For now, I encourage MKO leadership and health staff to prepare to receive your second shipment of the Moderna vaccines. We also encourage everyone to become informed about the vaccine and accept it when you become eligible. We will also continue to monitor and advocate for access to the vaccine for people who live off reserve.”

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

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