

COVID-19 Update

For more information:
Canada.ca/coronavirus

Information for Indigenous communities:
Canada.ca/coronavirus-info-indigenous



INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA – Ontario Region – December 16, 2021

The holidays are right around the corner and the Omicron variant of concern is spreading rapidly. Like many of you, we are also tired of COVID-19, new variants, public health measures, and making difficult choices to keep our loved ones and communities safe. It is easy to start to tune out messages that ask you to keep making the right choices, keep encouraging your communities to get vaccinated, and keep doing the things that have kept us safe so far, like wearing masks and limiting close contacts. But now is not the time to be complacent. We must double down and do what we know works so that we can get through this Omicron wave without seeing a sharp rise in case numbers. We strongly encourage you to ask your community members to reconsider their holiday plans and gather only with people living in their household.

Vaccination is still one of the most effective tools we have to fight serious infection against COVID-19. We ask that you continue to encourage those in your communities who are eligible for a booster shot to get one. Boosters can significantly improve defences against serious illness and early data suggest that boosters are effective against Omicron. We have the opportunity – right now – to stem this tide and protect our communities.

Michael O'Byrne, Acting Regional Executive and Anne Scotton, Regional Director General

Preparing for an increase in COVID-19 cases: Additional support available

As the Omicron variant of concern takes hold in Ontario, we encourage all communities to take precautionary steps to prepare for a possible rise in COVID-19 cases in the coming days and weeks. It is highly recommended that you review your community's emergency plans and identify - in advance - any additional support that you may require.

The needs-based portion of the Indigenous Community Support Fund (ICSF) and the Public Health Measures Fund remain available to support Indigenous communities and organizations, both on- and off-reserve, to prepare, prevent and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Needs-based funding requests will continue to be accepted and evaluated until all available funding has been fully exhausted. Each request is assessed for eligibility and prioritized on a case-by-case needs-basis, according to the following criteria: COVID-19 risk; readiness; human impact; and prior funding. Examples of activities that may be funded under these programs include:

- Cultural, children and family, and senior supports
- Isolation space
- Community-based workers
- Measures to address food insecurity
- Personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies
- Mental health and emergency response activities
- Supports to update, review or activate pandemic plans
- Perimeter security

[Click here](#) for more information and to learn about the application process.

Health staffing over the holidays

Across Ontario Region, there are challenges recruiting and retaining Registered Nurses to fulfill roles in primary health care. Although these shortages are being experienced Canada-wide, and in many instances beyond Canada's borders, they are having local effects. Going forward, nursing station staffing levels are close to 50%. At this point in time, ISC continues to staff the nursing stations. However, given the decreased number of available nurses, care priorities will need to be identified. For example, staff will be dedicated to COVID-19 vaccination and to urgent, emergent response. This is an evolving situation that is significantly affected by variables outside of our control. However, ISC is actively working with health partners to maintain essential services in communities. ISC will provide regular updates through this forum and directly to the affected communities via the community leadership.

Government of Canada advises against non-essential travel

On Thursday, December 15, the Government of Canada updated its travel guidance to recommend that people living in Canada do not travel outside of the country for non-essential reasons. Learn more about this change [here](#).

COVID-19 Vaccines for Ontario

*All data reflects totals from 8 p.m. on December 15, 2021

- **137,803** Daily doses administered
- **24,849,505** Total doses administered
- **11,345,168** People fully vaccinated

Update on Operation Remote Immunity 3.0

Phase one of Operation Remote Immunity 3.0 (ORI 3.0) will wrap up on December 18, 2021. In partnership with Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority and the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority, ORI 3.0 has visited 25 remote communities over the last month to provide booster (third) doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, as well as first, second, and pediatric doses. Phase two of ORI 3.0 begins in January to accommodate for vaccine dose intervals and to ensure that everyone wants to receive a vaccine has the opportunity to do so. ORI 3.0 will align the booster dose intervals for the 18+ population with the new provincial guidance, which is now three months (84 days) after a second dose.

Michael O'Byrne becomes Ontario Region's Acting Regional Executive

As you may know, Garry Best retired from Indigenous Services Canada on Friday, December 10. Michael O'Byrne, the Associate Regional Director General for ISC Ontario Regional Operations, has accepted an offer to act as the Regional Executive until a permanent replacement is appointed. Michael is looking forward to engaging with you on COVID-19 and other health files affecting your communities.

Meet FNIHB Ontario Region's new Director of the Health Protection Unit

Dr. James Brooks is the incoming Director of the Health Protection Unit for FNIHB Ontario Region. Dr. Brooks has been an infectious disease consultant for 20 years and is a Lecturer in the Department of Medicine at the University of Ottawa. In his last position, Dr. Brooks was the Director of the Antimicrobial Resistance Division in the Center for Communicable Diseases at the Public Health Agency of Canada where he worked with his team to better integrate national antimicrobial resistance/antimicrobial use surveillance data; improve antimicrobial stewardship education; conduct surveillance of healthcare associated infections; develop national guidance for healthcare-associated infection prevention and control; and conduct tuberculosis surveillance across Canada.

For a decade he ran the National Laboratory at the Public Health Agency of Canada striving to improve access to testing and data flow on drug-resistant HIV infections in Canada. Lessons learned from the domestic program, including the use of dried blood spot testing, were used to help the World Health Organization to expand HIV drug resistance testing in low- and middle-income countries. Dr. Brooks was part of the national Ebola response and was twice deployed to West Africa in a mobile Ebola testing laboratory.

Born in England, Dr. Brooks has been in Canada for most of his life, and lives in Ottawa with his wife and three children. Interestingly, Dr. Brooks can ride a penny farthing (a bike with one giant wheel and one tiny one).

Dr. Brooks replaces Dr. Maurica Maher, who accepted a new position in October.

New COVID-19 Communications Resources

The OneHealth Portal is routinely updated with new communications resources to assist with your communications efforts. Notably, you can now find the following new items on the [Ontario OneHealth.ca Portal](#):

- A [holiday infographic](#) that promotes best practices to limit the spread of COVID-19.
- The latest version of the [ISC COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit](#) (Update 10), which includes social media posts on pediatric vaccination, resources for kids, and information on international travel.
- An updated version of the [Regional COVID-19 Communications Resources List](#).

You can also find a copy of a public health alert with guidance on the Omicron variant of concern on OneHealth.ca or by [clicking here](#). We highly recommend taking the time to read this guidance developed by the FNIHB Ontario team.

Government of Canada signs agreements for COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments

The Government of Canada has signed agreements with Merck and Pfizer for access to their COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments (pills). The agreement with Merck provides Canada with 500,000 courses of its COVID-19 oral antiviral treatment, molnupiravir, with options for up to 500,000 more, pending Health Canada authorization. Health Canada has not yet approved these treatments.

Health Canada is prioritizing the review of all COVID-19 vaccines and drugs. Deliveries of these treatments are expected to start following Health Canada authorization of the treatments.

While effective, easy-to-use and accessible treatments, such as the ones produced by Merck and Pfizer, will be critical to reducing the severity of COVID-19 illness and will help save lives (read more [here](#)), [vaccination remains the best way to protect public health from COVID-19](#).

COVID-19 Cases

*As of December 16, 2021, @ 12:00 p.m.

- **3,563** confirmed in-community
- **249** active cases on reserve
- **38** deaths
- **3,276** resolved (91.9%)