

ISC-AB Weekly Vaccine Update February 23, 2021

General Updates:

- While case numbers were trending downward, Alberta First Nations are now reporting new active cases on-reserve. As of February 22, 2021, there are a total of 5944 confirmed cases on-reserve, of which 498 are active in 29 First Nations communities. 5385 cases have recovered, 49 individuals are in hospital (18 in the intensive care unit) and 61 individuals have passed away.
- A recent uptick in active cases in First Nations has caused cases to plateau at current levels. The new COVID-19 variants remain a concern and there is still a chance we may see the variants spread to First Nations communities. With the recent increase in cases, it is important to continue to follow public health measures.

Vaccine General Update:

- As part of this first phase of vaccine rollout, 10,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been delivered to First Nations in Alberta, and over 6,600 have been administered. ISC-AB is tracking data and producing infographics and updates which will be sent to communities more regularly in coming weeks.
- On February 24, 2021, the last group of phase I, all Albertans over age 75, will be able to begin making appointments to receive the vaccine.
- The Government of Alberta has now also announced Phase II vaccine plans, from April - September 2021, and will begin with all Albertans aged 65 - 74 and First Nation on and off reserve aged 50 - 64. Phase II Group B will be Albertans aged 18 - 64 with high risk underlying health conditions (details on conditions yet to be released), Group C will be other congregate care settings such as homeless shelters, Group D will include all Albertans aged 50 - 64, and First Nations individuals aged 35 - 49. Alberta Health has good information on the different phases of vaccine rollout over the next year. Information on these phases can be found here: <https://www.alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine.aspx>
- Communities are at different stages of their vaccine clinics, with some communities still administering first doses and some communities now completing their clinics. Over the past few weeks, ISC-AB has recognized need for surge supports and extra nurses have been hired on to support clinics. University of Alberta nursing students have also been engaged to support. If any Nation does need support for their clinics, contact ISC-AB.
- ISC-AB has received some requests for additional vaccines, but there are no further doses available at this time. Any extra, unused doses can be given as determined by you and your health staff. Over the next weeks, please use up all your vaccine supply on first doses and vaccinate as many individuals as possible. If there is hesitancy, you can move on to other groups considered vulnerable or provide doses to frontline staff who have not received any doses yet.
- Please continue to enter your COVID-19 vaccine inventory into the AVI system daily if you have any doses left in your vaccine fridge at the end of the day – even if you have not administered any vaccines that day. These updates do not need to be done on weekends or days when a nurse is not on-site. Updating the AVI system with your current number of doses by 9pm daily allows AH to track unused vaccines and keep them aware of what is available in province.

- Second doses for the over 65 population have not been added to the First Nations vaccine inventory yet, but are anticipated to be added within 35 days after initial doses were delivered to community. Receiving second doses in communities will follow the same process as followed for first doses, and communities will receive the exact same amount as they received of first doses.

Community Sharing:

- The Region has been hearing some great success stories from First Nations with this first phase of vaccine rollout. We hope to learn and build on this first phase and encourage you all to share your stories. Some of the best practices we are hearing include:
 - Having health staff available through meetings or calls to answer any questions Elders have about the vaccine;
 - Having staff on hand to provide information at the clinics, helping Elders feel more comfortable with their knowledge of the vaccine;
 - Working closely with Elders programs in community – these programs provided contact information, helped coordinate travel and set appointments and helped Elders feel comfortable in getting vaccines;
 - Having planning in place so that everything ran smoothly at the clinic, making sure pre-screening was complete, having people on standby in the case of any last minute refusals, having any members who needed to contact a physician do so in advance and setting up multiple clinics to support those who wanted to wait to receive the vaccine;
 - Making the clinics less intimidating through offering door prizes, offering care packages once the vaccine was received, having support staff available and sending people home with information they needed to monitor for any reactions and feel comfortable.

Questions:

- ***Has PHAC released any guidance about fully vaccinated people not having to quarantine if exposed to COVID-19?***
 - There is limited evidence on whether someone who received the vaccine is able or not able to spread the virus. This will be monitored as more people in the community receive the vaccine. Everyone must continue to follow public health measures, regardless of their COVID-19 immunization status, to protect themselves, their loved ones, as well as people and communities at risk of more severe disease or outcomes from COVID-19.
<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-vaccine-q-and-a-health-care-practitioners.pdf>
- ***What about the number of people that received an extra dose from the vials? In communities where a number of bonus doses have been extracted from vials, how can we ensure those that receive these doses are able to get a second dose?***
 - We do expect that any 'bonus' doses that communities were able to extract will be able to be extracted in the next round. Large communities have been able to administer over 20 extra doses. ISC-AB will work with communities to support and plan to ensure all individuals that received a first dose get a second dose.
- ***Are there further updates on serological testing?***

- This is the website which talks about serology testing and province involvement in 4 serology studies: <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=72674DA5732FB-E63F-7794-F2F6FE6DD5C9EA12>
- AHS also has one pager on serology testing on their website detailing currently for surveys/research use: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/lab/wf-lab-bulletin-pl-serology-testing-for-covid-19.pdf>
- ***There have been recent media reports on a single dose of COVID-19 being so effective that a second dose is not necessary. Yes/No?***
 - ***Both doses of vaccine are required***, as the second dose gives peak antibody response. As we are working to immunize as many people as possible, new studies are showing the length of time between first and second doses can be delayed longer than previously though. In some jurisdictions, the focus is on getting as many people vaccinated as quickly as possible so the waiting period has been delayed. Quebec is waiting 3 months between doses and other research has shown second dose can be delayed longer than 42 days. There may be more guidance coming from the Government of Canada, but 42 days is still the recommended period to delay between doses in Alberta.

Thank you all for your continued participation and patience. We will meet next week, **March 2, 2021 at 1:00pm.**