

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19):

Bulletin to First Nations in Alberta: April 1, 2021

Office of the Senior Medical Officer of Health

Please email questions about COVID-19 to: sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca

On March 22, the Government of Alberta announced that the province will not move into Step 3 of its phased reopening due to the increasing number of cases and rising hospitalizations. There is a rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC) in the province and in First Nation communities. These new VOC strains are more contagious and spread more easily than the original COVID-19 strain and there is potential for rapid spread between household members and within households. Although highly contagious, these VOC are believed to spread in the same way as the original COVID-19 virus and transmission can be prevented using the same types of preventive strategies. It is essential that everyone continue to follow public health measures, especially gathering restrictions over the upcoming holidays as these measures are required to prevent the spread of the virus, regardless of what strain it is. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC-AB), and the Government of Alberta continue to monitor the situation closely.

Status Update

Number of Cases Reported* as of April 1, 2021:

*numbers are changing rapidly and may change after this bulletin is released

Alberta: There are **8350 Active Cases** of COVID-19 in Alberta. **2,660** active cases have been identified as VOC.

	Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada)	First Nations On Reserve in Canada (Indigenous Services Canada)	Alberta (Alberta Health)
Confirmed Cases	982,116	24,843	148,332
Deaths	22,959	283	1,990
Recovered	911,293	23,743	137,992

First Nations living on and off reserve (Alberta): There are **13,711** confirmed cases of COVID-19 to date and **134** deaths in First Nations living on and off reserve in Alberta. Confirmed cases are: **2,178** in Calgary Zone; **3,157** in Edmonton Zone; **1,137** in South Zone; **4,574** in North Zone; **2,654** in Central zone and **11** unknown. Aggregate data on COVID-19 First Nations cases in Alberta is available at:

<http://www.afnigc.ca/main/index.php?id=home> and <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-alberta-data.aspx>.

Additional First Nations on-reserve data (Alberta) is provided at the end of this document (*Appendix A*).

First Nations living on reserve in Alberta:



Location (By Zone)	Confirmed Cases	Active Cases	Recovered
Calgary Zone	1105	18	1073
South Zone	664	57	597
Central Zone	1896	36	1842
Edmonton Zone	394	5	381
North Zone	3154	153	2977
TOTAL	7213	269	6870



Testing in Alberta – Update

- As of March 28, 2021, the total number of reported swab samples collected to date in First Nation communities in Alberta is **109,235**.
- **Testing remains a powerful tool to help limit the spread.** Priority testing is available to individuals exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19; all close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases; and anyone linked to a known outbreak. If you have symptoms, please stay home and book a testing appointment.
- **Reminder:** Testing outside of the provincial testing criteria must be reviewed and supported by the ISC-AB MOHs. Please send testing enquiries to the ISC-AB MOH by: sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca

Vaccine Watch

COVID-19 Vaccine in First Nations Communities in Alberta as of March 30, 2021

- **20,000**, doses have been delivered to First Nations communities in Alberta
- **18,773** doses have been administered in **46** Nations (bands) in Alberta
- **11,780** First Nations people living on reserve have received at least one dose
- **6,488** First Nations people living on reserve are fully immunized (2 doses)
- **3,239** First Nations people aged 65 years and older living on reserve have received their first dose.
- **2,693** First Nations people aged 65 years and older living on reserve are fully immunized (2 doses)

New Developments

1. Phase 2B of the vaccine rollout has started and includes First Nations people aged 16 or older with an [eligible chronic health condition](#) (including cancer, diabetes, immunosuppression, and other conditions with higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19). First Nations communities will be able to start ordering their vaccine for Phase 2B, once Alberta Health confirms the arrival date of the Moderna vaccine.
2. Alberta has temporarily paused the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine in individuals under the age of 55 following reports in Europe of blood clots as a possible side effect. This pause is a precautionary measure that is being taken across Canada to allow Health Canada to conduct further assessments. To date there are no reported cases of blood clots following immunization in Alberta or anywhere in Canada. Studies are underway that will help determine what vaccine those under the age of 55 already immunized with AstraZeneca will be able to receive when the time comes for their second dose in the months ahead.
3. The AstraZeneca vaccine will be offered to Albertans over the age of 55, when more doses arrive in the coming weeks. Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends that the AstraZeneca vaccine should still be offered to adults 55 years of age and older with informed consent, as the risk of clotting appears to be lower and the outcomes of severe illness, hospitalization and death due to COVID-19 disease in this population present a much greater risk than not being vaccinated.
4. Indigenous Services Canada has developed a new [Fact Sheet](#) on COVID-19 vaccines.

Reminders

1. Minor and temporary adverse events, such as headache, fever, fatigue, or pain at the injection site, are common after all vaccinations. All individuals are encouraged to seek medical attention if they experience any new or worsening symptoms and to [report any adverse events](#) after immunization to their healthcare professionals.
2. The very rare risk of blood clots is specific to the AstraZeneca vaccine. To date, no such event has been reported in Canada. The mRNA vaccines such as Pfizer and Moderna have had no major issues. No AstraZeneca is being provided in Alberta First Nations. Moderna will continue to be provided to First Nation Communities.
3. Anyone eligible in Phase 1 and 2A of Alberta's vaccine rollout who hasn't yet received the vaccine can continue to book their appointment with their local Health Centre, through a participating pharmacy or by calling 811.
4. Individuals that book a first dose of vaccine will have their second dose timelines [extended up to 4 months](#), and the appointment will be booked at a later date.
5. ISC-AB will continue to support information sharing on clinics and best practices. A number of resources are available on [OneHealth](#), including a clinic planning guide and checklist.

6. Alberta Health has created a COVID-19 Vaccine Q&A document for healthcare practitioners that can be found on the [Alberta Immunization Policy](#) webpage or accessed directly [here](#).
7. ISC-AB hosts a vaccine information session every Tuesday from 1-2 pm.
8. ISC has launched a [COVID-19 vaccine page](#) that is updated regularly.

Alberta's Relaunch - Update

- **[New]** Alberta has pushed back moving into Step 3 of its phased reopening. The trend of hospitalizations did not meet the criteria to move into Step 3 restrictions; health measures for the province will remain under current Step 2 restrictions.
- **Reminder:** A decision to move to [Step 3](#) will be made after at least three weeks of evaluation to assess the spread of COVID-19. Further easing measures will only happen when hospitalizations start to decline.

COVID-19 Variants of Concern (VOC)

- **[New]** Alberta has the highest number of VOC in the country; **31.9%** of active cases in Alberta are VOC. As of March 31, Alberta has detected **4,030** cases of the B.1.1.7 variant first identified in the United Kingdom; **20** cases of the B.1.351 variant first identified in South Africa; and **5** cases of the P.1 variant first identified in Brazil. More information on COVID-19 variants cases can be found [here](#).
- **[New]** Currently there are **58** cases of VOC on-reserve in Alberta First Nations.
- **Reminder:** The [VOC](#) are more infectious, causing it to spread more easily. The main variant spreading in Alberta is the B.1.1.7 strain which is more contagious and has higher rates of transmission within households. There is also preliminary evidence that some variants have an impact on the efficacy of some vaccines and drugs, but more research is needed to confirm these findings.
- **Reminder:** If a person tests positive for a COVID-19 variant and chooses to stay in their own home to isolate, **household contacts need to stay at home in quarantine until 14 days have passed from the end of the case's isolation period, which is 10 days**. This means, household contacts that stay at home need to quarantine for 24 days. Isolating in a different location, such as an isolation facility/hotel is encouraged. An ISC-AB VOC Fact Sheet can be found on [OneHealth](#) under COVID-19 variants.

What the Government of Canada and ISC/FNIHB-AB Are Doing

- **Reminder:** The Government of Canada's "Vaccine Community Innovation Challenge" encourages individuals and/or groups across Canada to help promote vaccine confidence in their communities. Twenty finalists will be given \$25,000 to develop their ideas and launch their campaigns. A grand prize of \$100,000 will be awarded to one winner at the end of the challenge period. The deadline to submit a proposal is **April 9, 2021**. More information can be found [here](#).
- **Reminder:** The deadline for new applications for a Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) has been extended from March 31 to June 30, 2021. This program provides interest-free loans of up to \$60,000 to small businesses and not-for-profits. Repaying the balance of the loan on or before December 31, 2022 will result in loan forgiveness of 33 percent (up to \$20,000).

Mental Health and Wellness

- **[New]** ISC-AB is presenting a mental health telehealth session on Harm Reduction – Innovation and Best Practices on Wednesday **April 7** from 1-3 pm. More information can be found [here](#).
- **Reminder:** Individuals and front-line workers can access mental health and substance use support, resources, and counselling during COVID-19 through [Wellness Together Canada](#).

Virtual Care Clinic

- **Reminder:** The Alberta Indigenous Virtual Care Clinic serves individuals self-identifying as First Nations, Inuit and Métis and their families. AIVCC provides same day care to rural and urban Indigenous people residing in Alberta via secure video or phone service and can be reached at 1-888-342-4822 or www.aivcc.ca.

Additional Information

If you have general questions about COVID-19 or require current information, please refer to the following websites which are trusted information sources and are being regularly maintained and updated. **Should you have questions about COVID-19, please do not hesitate to email: sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca**

OneHealth - <https://www.onehealth.ca/ab/ABCovid-19>

InfoPoint (First Nations Health Manager Association) – This site is designed for First Nation health managers to access credible sources of information related to COVID-19. To access this service, call the toll-free number at **1-855-446-2719**, or email InfoPoint@fnhma.ca

Alberta Health

- Coronavirus info for Albertans: <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx>

Alberta Health Services

- Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19): <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx>
- Indigenous Peoples & Communities (COVID-19):
https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17101.aspx?fbclid=IwAR1hzie9aLgDLr0K7Qi80mb9ozNby5dK6VZO3CFhhKgLrALUp06_wGmSxUc

Indigenous Services Canada COVID-19 (Updates available in several Indigenous languages)

- COVID-19 & Indigenous Communities: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1581964230816/1581964277298>

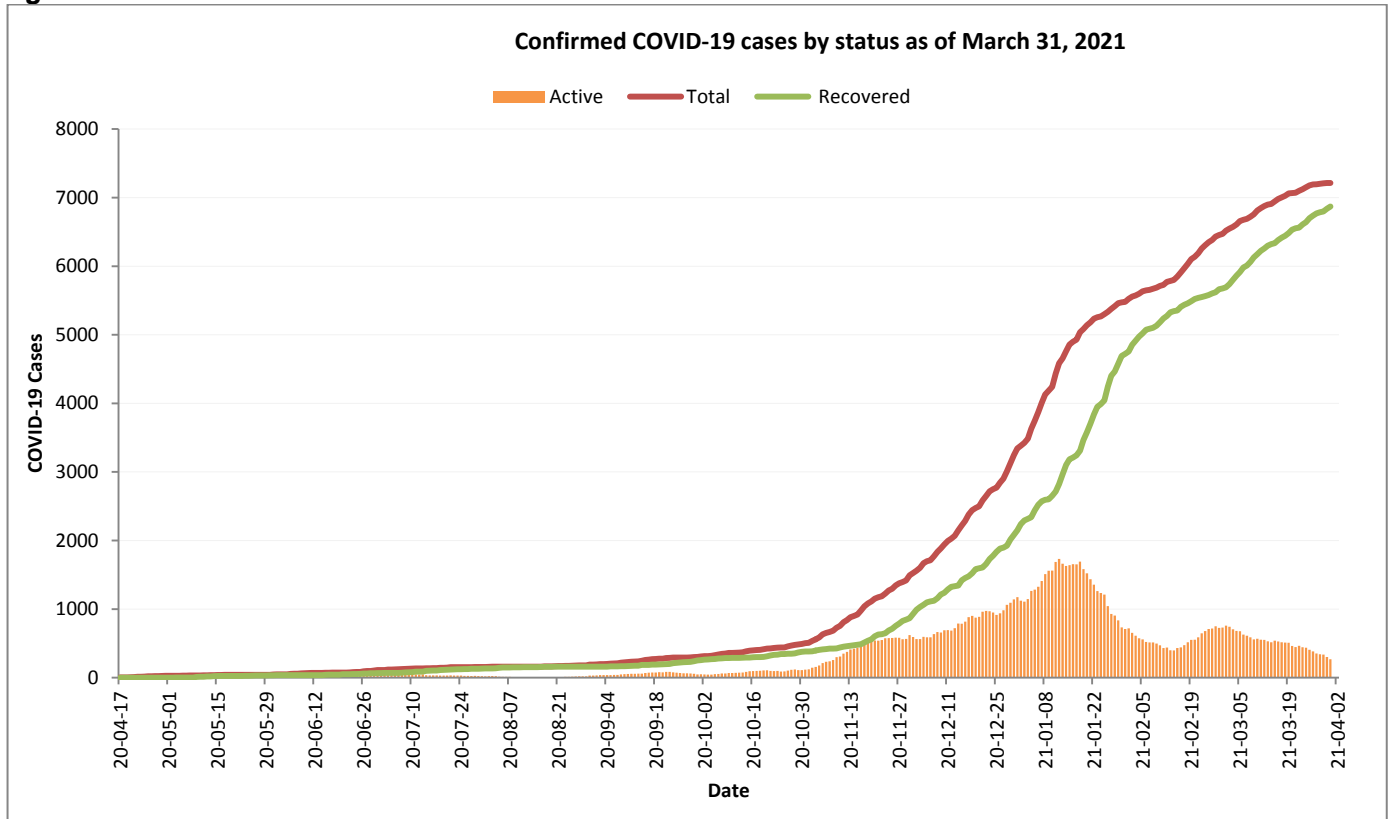
Mental health and coping resources are available for individuals who are struggling or need a little extra support.

- The Mental Health Help Line [1-877-303-2642](tel:1-877-303-2642) is available 24/7 to provide advice and referrals to community supports near you.
- Hope for Wellness Help Line [1-855-242-3310](tel:1-855-242-3310), 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Kids and teens can call the Kids Help Phone: [1-800-668-6868](tel:1-800-668-6868).
- Text COVID19HOPE to [393939](tel:393939) to subscribe to a free service supporting mental health and wellness in a time of stress and isolation.
- Family Violence Resources: <https://www.alberta.ca/family-violence-prevention-resources.aspx>
- **Text4Hope-Addiction Support** is designed to help Albertans dealing with psychological issues related to addiction. Text “Open2Change” to [393939](tel:393939) to subscribe.

<p>Anyone with specific questions or concerns about their health is encouraged to call Health Link at 811 for health advice.</p>

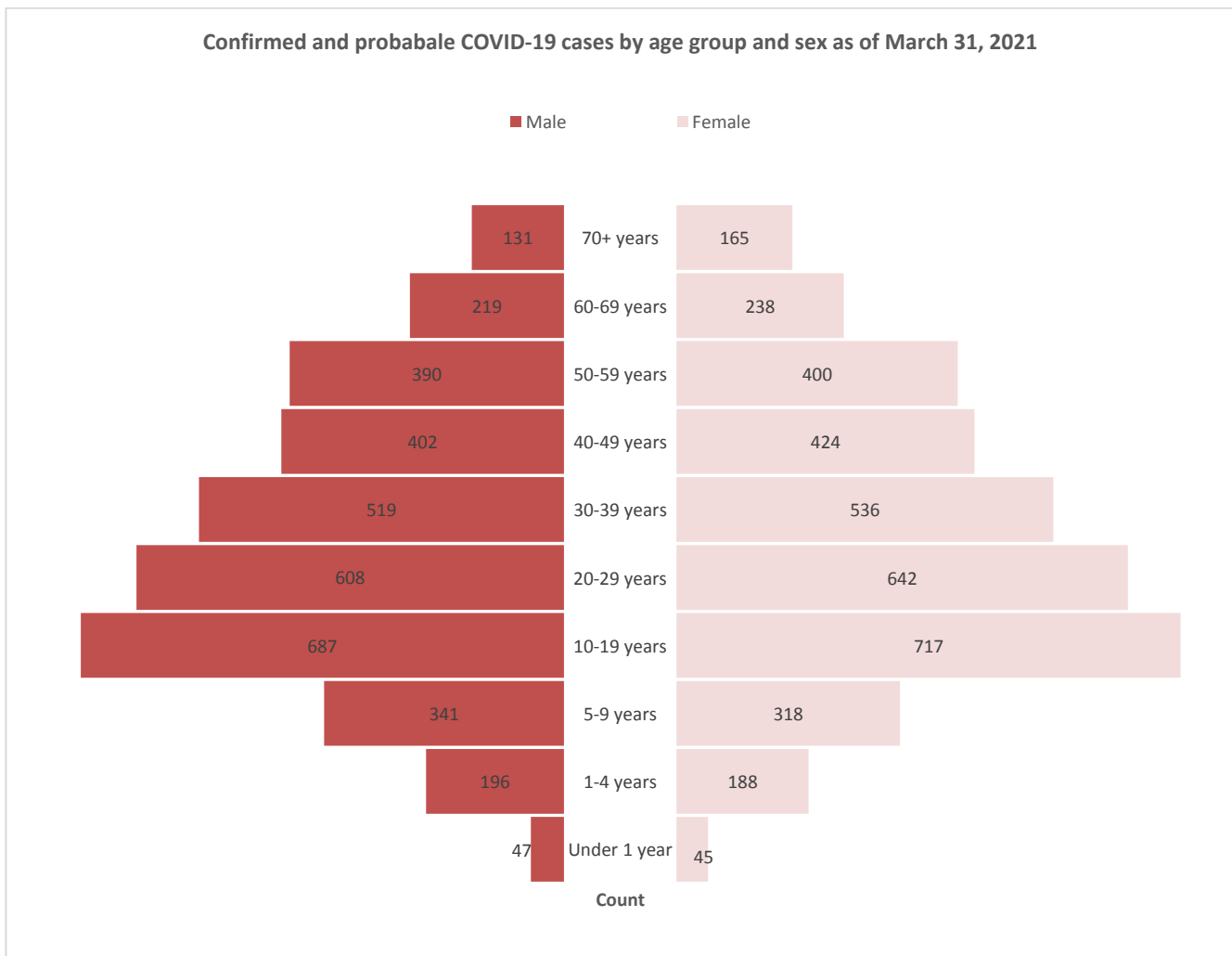
APPENDIX A: Additional COVID-19 Data in First Nations On-Reserve in Alberta

Fig 1.



The number of active cases in First Nations communities increased from 3 on April 17, 2020 to 29 on May 8, 2020 and then gradually decreased to 8 on May 30, 2020. Thereafter, the number of active cases began to increase again peaking at 54 on July 7, 2020 followed by a period of decline until August 17, 2020. Subsequently, there was a relatively slow increase in active cases up until November 2, 2020 when cases began increasing more rapidly to a high of 1731 active cases on January 12, 2021. In the following month, the number of active decreased until it reached a low of 396 on February 14, 2021. The number of daily active cases increased again reaching a peak of 758 on March 01, 2021. The number of active cases has been decreasing since March 1, 2021. At the time of this publication, there were a total of 7,213 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in First Nations communities in Alberta out of which 269 cases are currently active and 6870 have recovered.

Fig 2.



While 51.4% of all cases among individuals living in First Nations communities in Alberta occurred between the ages of 10 and 39 years, 49.3% of all Albertans cases occurred among those ages between 10 and 39 years. Females accounted for 50.9% of all cases in First Nations communities in Alberta and 49.7% among all Albertans.