

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19):

Bulletin to First Nations in Alberta: December 16, 2021

Office of the Senior Medical Officer of Health

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

As we enter the holiday season, with the emergence of the Omicron variant, it continues to be important to follow public health guidance over the holidays. The state of public health emergency in Alberta has lapsed, but public health measures in Alberta remain in place. The following [mandatory restrictions for social gatherings](#) were updated on December 15 as follows:

- Indoor private social gatherings are limited to a maximum of 10 people 18 and older, no limits on those under 18. Children under age 17 do not count toward the total, there are no household limits and there are no restrictions based on vaccine status.
- Outdoor private social gatherings remain limited to a maximum of 20 people, with 2 metre physical distancing between households at all times.
- **Wearing masks, physical distancing and hand washing are encouraged during indoor gatherings over the holidays. If anyone hosting or attending a holiday gathering has symptoms of COVID-19 they are required to isolate immediately and should book a test at their local health centre or AHS testing site. Please do not attend holiday events if you are ill. This is difficult, but is very important in limiting the spread of COVID-19.**

Premier Kenney announced that starting on Friday, December 17, Albertans will be able to pick up free COVID-19 rapid testing kits at select Alberta Health Services sites and select pharmacies in Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer. Supply of the rapid test kits are limited. There are processes in place whereby First Nation communities can access rapid test kits for their members. Contact your Band Office or Health Centre for more information. If a person has a positive rapid test result, they should immediately isolate and should book a confirmatory molecular test at their local Health Centre or AHS testing site. Should gatherings be held with individuals that are not vaccinated, it is encouraged to use these tests to ensure all are safe. Further information is available through <https://www.alberta.ca/rapid-testing-at-home.aspx>. A negative **rapid testing result does not guarantee an individual does not have COVID-19 and the best protection against COVID-19 is to get vaccinated and follow public health measures.**

The new variant of COVID-19, Omicron (B.1.1.529) is spreading across the country, with 60 cases identified in Alberta as of December 15, 2021 and one case cluster being investigated in one First Nation community. Preliminary studies have found the variant to be significantly more transmissible. Due to the increased transmissibility there are concerns of a fifth wave in Alberta. With a larger number of individuals infected we could see even more hospitalization/ICU admissions compared to the fourth wave.

A full vaccine series of two doses at the recommended interval (8 weeks between doses) is proven to significantly reduce the risk of severe health outcomes from COVID-19. First Nations individuals 18 or older whose second COVID-19 vaccine dose was over 6 months ago can also be offered a third booster dose to restore protection against infection that may have decreased over time. Based on initial data, the third dose seems to offer more effective protection against the Omicron variant and is highly encouraged as the booster will be open to other age groups as soon as possible. Children aged 5-11 can now book their vaccine appointments at local health centres. Further information on pediatric vaccination is available here <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17745.aspx>.

This is the last MOH bulletin of 2021 and the next bulletin will be on January 13, 2022. Thank you all for your hard work throughout the past year. We wish everyone a safe and restful holiday season and will see you all in 2022!



Indigenous Services
Canada

Services aux
Autochtones Canada

Canada

Status Update

Number of Cases Reported* as of December 15, 2021:

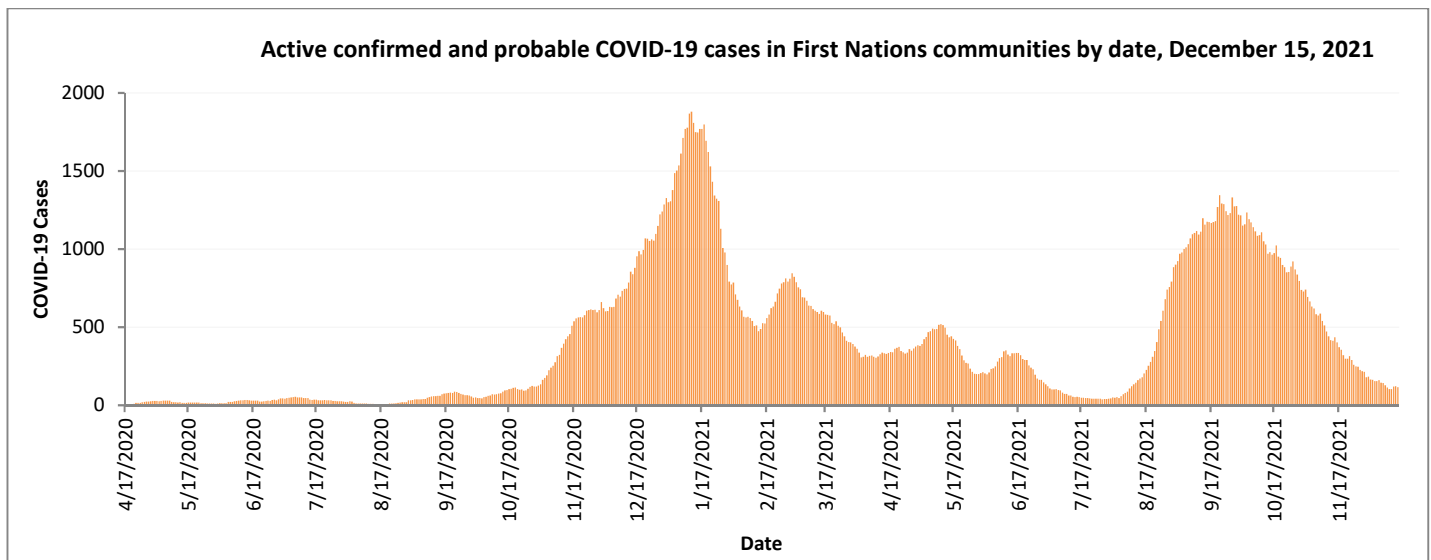
*numbers are changing rapidly and may change after this bulletin is released

Alberta: There are **4,082 Active Cases** of COVID-19 in Alberta.

First Nations in Alberta: 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>.

First Nations	Total Cases	Recovered Case	Active Cases	Deaths	Currently Hospitalized	Communities with Active Cases
Living on Reserve in Alberta	14,402	14,140	114	147	22	29
Living on and off reserve in Alberta	28,592	28,126	192	274	47	NA



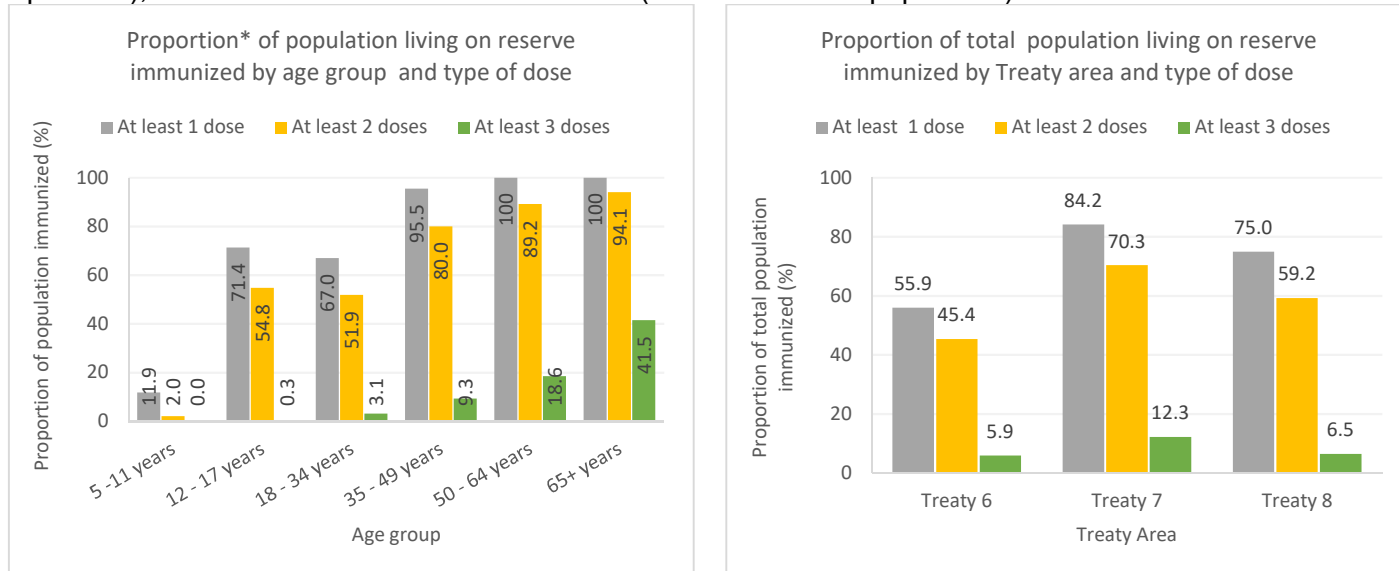
COVID-19 in First Nations living on reserve in Alberta				
Treaty Area	Total Cases	Active Cases	Recovered Cases	Deaths
Treaty 6	6,583	59	6,467	57
Treaty 7	3,387	15	3,318	54
Treaty 8	4,432	40	4,355	37
TOTAL	14,402	114	14,140	148

COVID-19 Vaccine

COVID-19 Vaccine in First Nations people living on reserve in Alberta as of December 15, 2021.

- **107,342 (21,726 are imported)** doses have been administered to First Nations living on-reserve in Alberta.
 - **55,728** First Nations people living on reserve have received at least one dose
 - **45,304** First Nations people living on reserve have received at least two doses
 - **6,310** First Nations people living on reserve have received three doses
- Approximately 85.2% of the population aged 12 years and older living on reserve have received at least

one dose (69.6% of the total population), 70.6% have received at least two doses (56.6% of the total population), and 9.9% have received three doses (7.9% of the total population).



*Percentages are calculated using unadjusted ISC-IRS on-reserve and Crown land population as of December 31, 2020. If the proportion of population immunized in any age group exceeds 100% because of population data limitation, we keep the proportion at 100% by adjusting the population to be equal to the number of first doses administered in that age group

20 Communities

Have vaccinated over 70% of total population living on reserve with the first dose

21 Communities

Have vaccinated 50 - 70% of total population living on reserve with the first dose

5 Communities

Have vaccinated less than 50% of total population living on reserve with the first dose

COVID-19 Vaccine - New Developments

- **[New]** The focus of Alberta Health Services has shifted to promoting booster shots which will be open to those over age 50 and health care workers on December 15, 2021. First Nations 18 years or older remain eligible for the booster shot, as long as 6 months have passed since they have received their second dose of the vaccine. The booster dose is highly encouraged as it has been shown to increase protection against the Omicron variant and breakthrough COVID-19 infection.
- **[New]** A special telehealth session on Sotrovimab (monoclonal antibody) therapy for COVID-19 was held on Thursday, December 16. The session is available at www.fntn.ca.

COVID-19 Rapid Testing in Alberta

- **[New]** Premier Kenney announced that starting on Friday, December 17, Albertans will be able to pick up free COVID-19 rapid testing kits at select Alberta Health Services sites and select pharmacies in Edmonton, Calgary, and Red Deer. Supply of the rapid test kits are limited. If you would be interested in receiving a supply of rapid tests for distribution to your members, please contact your health centre or local AHS site. Further information is available [here](#).
- Small and medium sized organizations in Alberta, including Indigenous organizations, employers, and service providers can apply to the [Alberta Health Rapid Testing Program](#) to receive free rapid test kits for use in their organization's COVID-19 screening program. Workplaces in First Nations can also access tests through the federal rapid screening program [here](#) and all schools on-reserve can submit a request to Alberta Education for rapid tests for school staff and students. Further information and forms can be found on the COVID-19 OneHealth page in the schools section: [COVID-19 Page \(onehealth.ca\)](#)
- **Reminder:** Alberta Education's kindergarten to Grade 6 At-Home Rapid Testing Program has been extended to include all Kindergarten to Grade 12 students attending schools in First Nations. Outbreak status is not required for First Nation schools wanting to participate in the program. Rapid screening tests are another tool, along with health measures already in place at schools, to keep students and staff safe. Participation is voluntary for students and staff. Further information and a request form can be found on the COVID-19 OneHealth page in the schools section: [COVID-19 Page \(onehealth.ca\)](#)
- If you have questions about the At-Home Rapid Testing Program, please email

COVID-19 Vaccine Reminders

1. As of November 30, unvaccinated individuals over the age of 12 will be unable to board a plane or train in Canada and negative COVID-19 tests will no longer serve as a substitute for being vaccinated. Alberta's vaccine record now meets the recommended Canadian standard for domestic and international travel. Vaccine records from First Nations, military, other provinces, and international travelers will continue to be accepted as proof of vaccination. In recognition of the unique needs of remote communities, interim accommodations continue to be in place including
 - a. Unvaccinated travelers flying out of remote communities are exempt from the mandatory testing requirement before they depart until local testing capacity is in place.
 - b. Currently, free, rapid high-quality COVID-19 testing is available at "gateway" airports for an interim period to enable these travelers to be tested as soon as possible in their journey to ensure their travel is safe for themselves and others.

COVID-19 Treatment in Alberta

- Alberta Health Services (AHS) has begun administering a new monoclonal antibody treatment for COVID-19 that was recently approved by Health Canada. Sotrovimab is a new drug that was developed specifically for treating individuals with COVID-19 who have mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms. It is the first treatment to be offered to outpatients. For maximum effectiveness, it must be administered by intravenous infusion within 5 days of symptom onset. The treatment is being rolled out across the province in a phased approach, starting with individuals with mild to moderate COVID 19 symptoms but are at the highest risk of severe outcomes. On December 2, 2021, AHS expanded Sotrovimab eligibility to individuals with COVID-19 if they can receive the treatment within five days of symptom onset who are:
 1. **Unvaccinated and are:**
 - Age 55 and older
 - OR
 - Age 18 and older with a pre-existing health condition including
 - diabetes (taking medication for treatment)
 - obesity (BMI >30)
 - chronic kidney disease (estimated glomerular filtration rate, <60 ml per minute per 1.73 m2 of body-surface area)
 - congestive heart failure (New York Heart Association class II, III, or IV)
 - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and moderate-to-severe asthma
 - OR
 - pregnant
 2. **Immunocompromised, due to one of the following reasons (vaccinated or unvaccinated):**
 - have received a transplant;
 - is an oncology patients who has received a dose of any IV or oral chemotherapy or other immunosuppressive treatment since December 2020;
 - has an inflammatory condition (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, inflammatory bowel disease) receiving a dose of any systemic immunosuppressive treatment since December 2020.
- **If you believe you are eligible, please call Health Link at 1-844-343-0971** and leave a message. Health Link staff will call you back and ask you some questions before referring you to a health professional who will determine if you are eligible, get your consent and book your appointment. If you have any questions about the eligibility status, additional information can be found in the [Patient FAQ](#). Eligibility criteria will continue to expand based on supply and capacity capabilities. More information on Sotrovimab can be found in the [Sotrovimab Patient Information Sheet](#), [FAQs for Patients/Public](#) or the [Alberta Health Website](#).

Alberta's Relaunch - Update

- **Reminder:** Alberta's public health measures remain in place. These measures include limiting gatherings, restricting indoor gatherings for unvaccinated individuals, work from home directives and mandatory masking in schools. More information on the public health measures and the restriction exemption program can be found [here](#).

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

- The Government of Canada has committed new funding to support the reopening of the arts, culture, heritage and sport sectors. The [Making Cultural Spaces Safe During COVID-19 Initiative](#), administered by Canada Cultural Spaces Fund, aims to help Canadian arts and heritage organizations prepare their spaces to reopen while following public health guidelines. The support can be used for renovating or adapting spaces, and for the purchase and installation of health and safety-related specialized equipment. There is no deadline to apply to the fund. Applications will be accepted on a continuous basis for projects to be carried out before March 31, 2022. To discuss your project and request an application form, please contact erica.potie@pch.gc.ca.
- **Reminder:** Nations that require additional surge supports for COVID-19 response or vaccine clinics including contact tracing, testing, and vaccine administration support should submit a [request form](#) to ISC-AB at: sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca.

Mental Health and Wellness

- **Reminder:** The COVID-19 pandemic has been stressful for many individuals, families, and communities who have all been affected in several ways. The [Hope for Wellness](#) help line offers immediate, toll-free telephone and online-chat based support and crisis intervention to all Indigenous people across Canada. Help is available in English and French, and upon request in Cree and Ojibway. Call the toll-free Help Line at **1-855-242-3310**, 24 hours a day, and 7 days a week.

Virtual Care Clinic

- **[New] Reminder:** The Alberta Indigenous Virtual Care Clinic (AIVCC) has updated their hours and they are now **open until 8:30pm on Wednesdays**. Over the holidays, the clinic closes at 4:30 with the exception of Wednesdays when the clinic will still be open until 8:30pm. The clinic closes early on December 24 and will be closed on December 25, 26, 31 and January 1.
- The AIVCC 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>

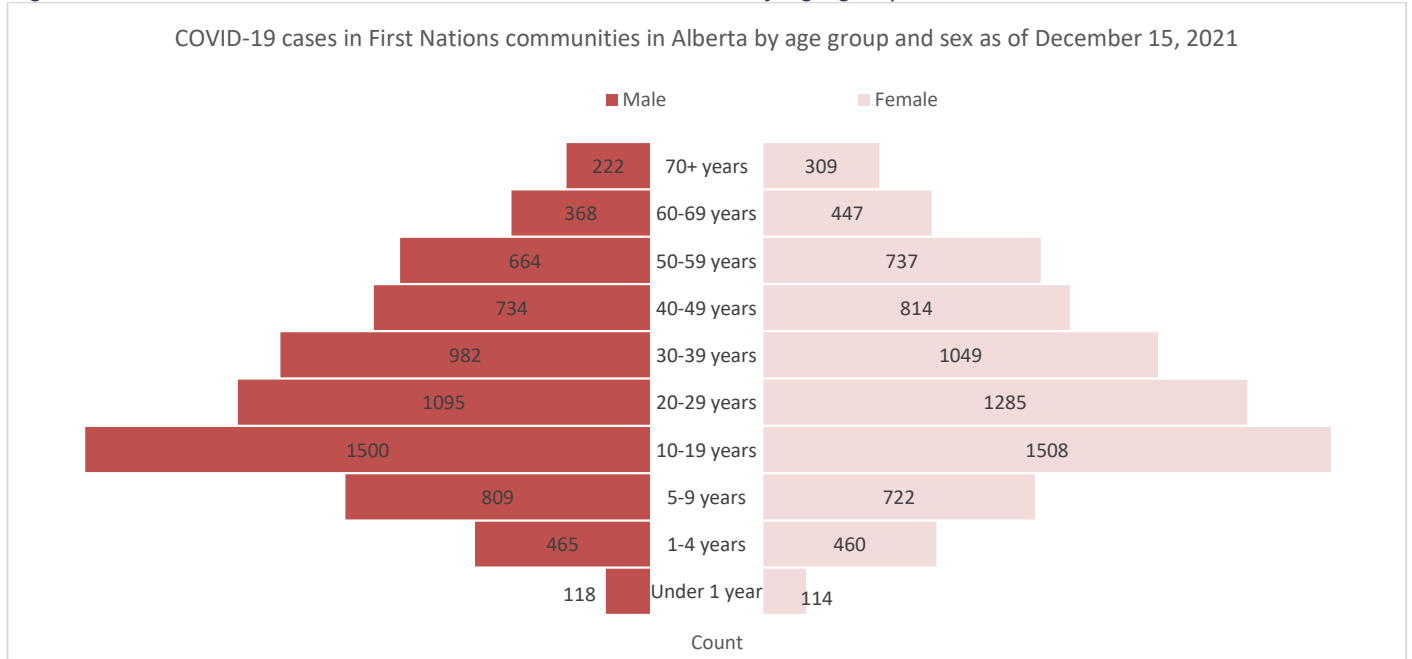
Mental health and coping resources are available for individuals who are struggling or need a little extra support.

- 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.

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

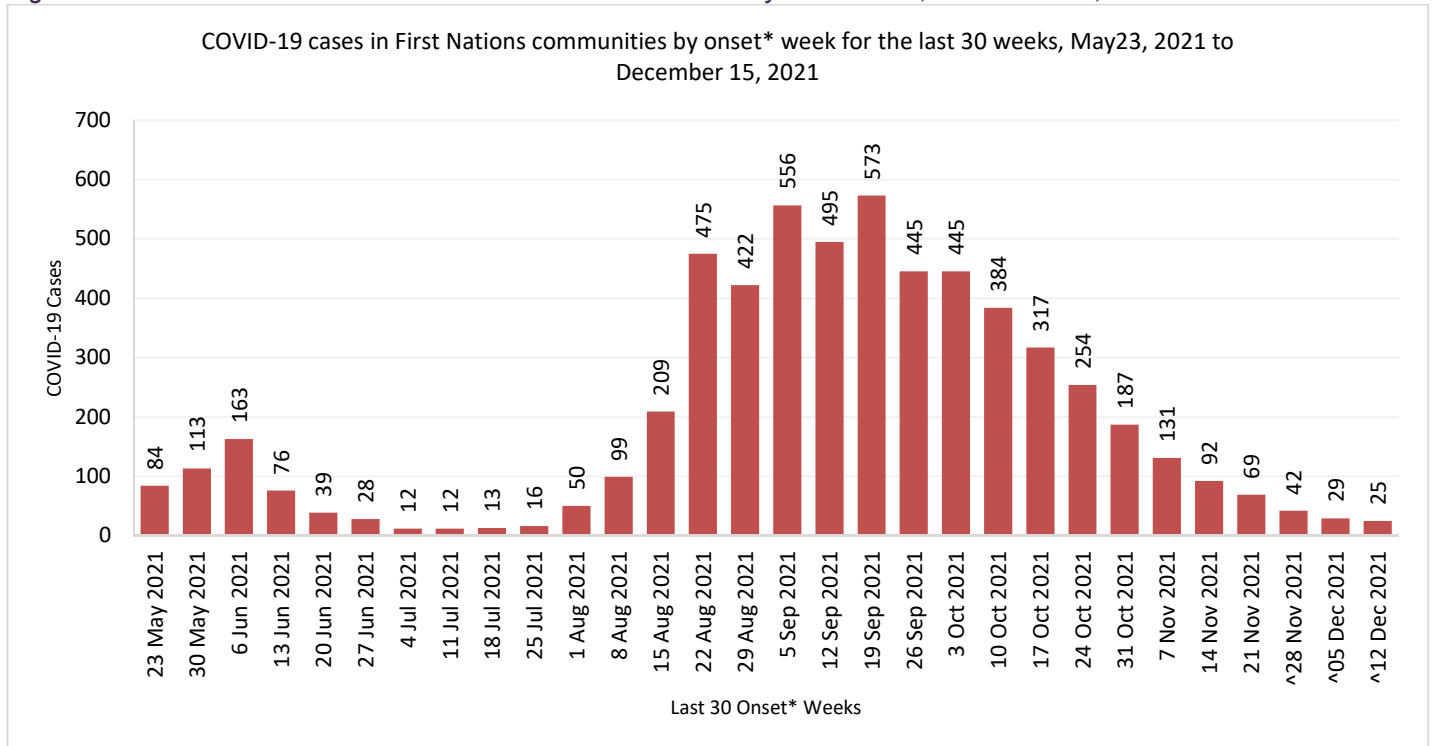
APPENDIX A: Additional COVID-19 Data in First Nations On-Reserve in Alberta

Fig 1. COVID-19 cases in First Nations communities in Alberta by age group and sex, December 15, 2021



Individuals between the ages of 10 and 39 years accounted for 51.5% of all cases in First Nations communities in Alberta and 50.4% of all cases in Alberta. Females accounted for 51.7 % of all cases in First Nations communities in Alberta and 49.7% among all Albertans.

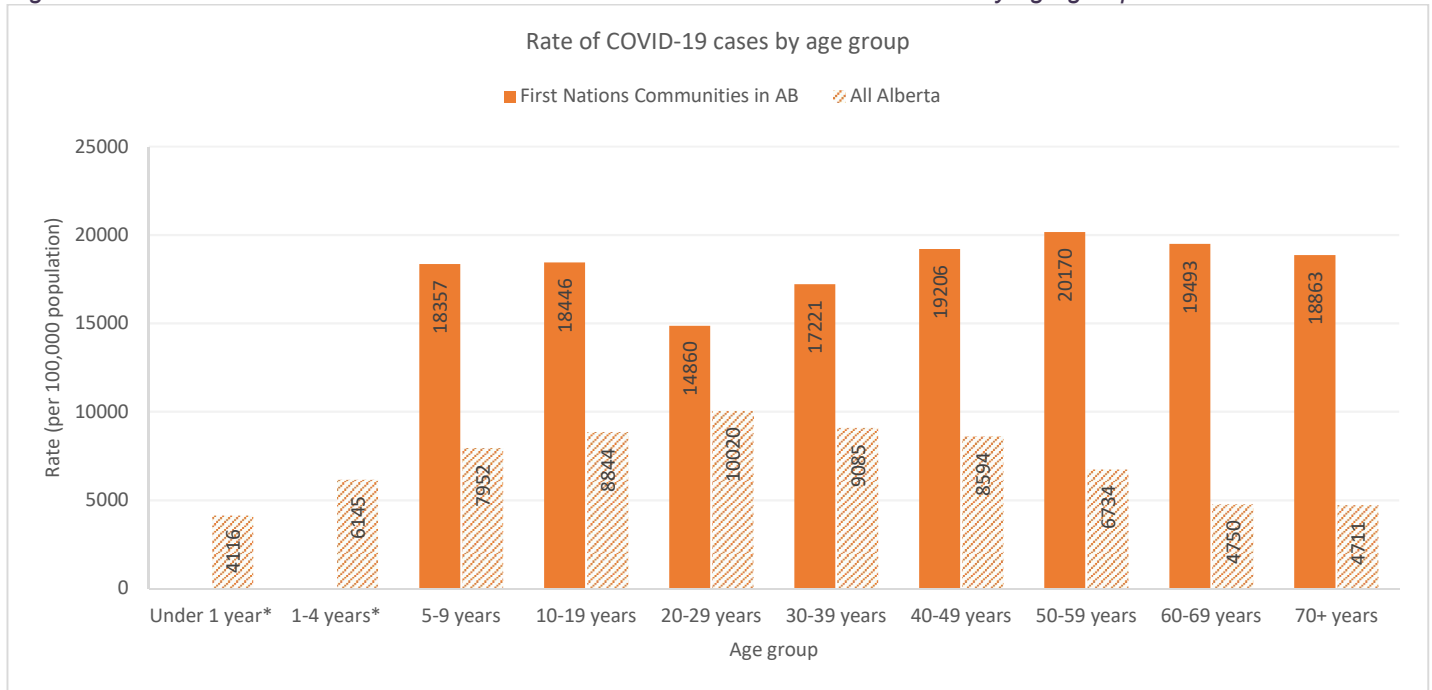
Fig 2. COVID-19 cases in First Nations communities in Alberta by onset week, December 15, 2021



Note: ^Data may be incomplete due to late receipt of lab reports. *Onset date is the earliest of the "symptoms onset" and "specimen collection" date.

In general, the weekly number of new COVID-19 cases have been decreasing since the week of September 19-25, 2021 in First Nation communities in Alberta.

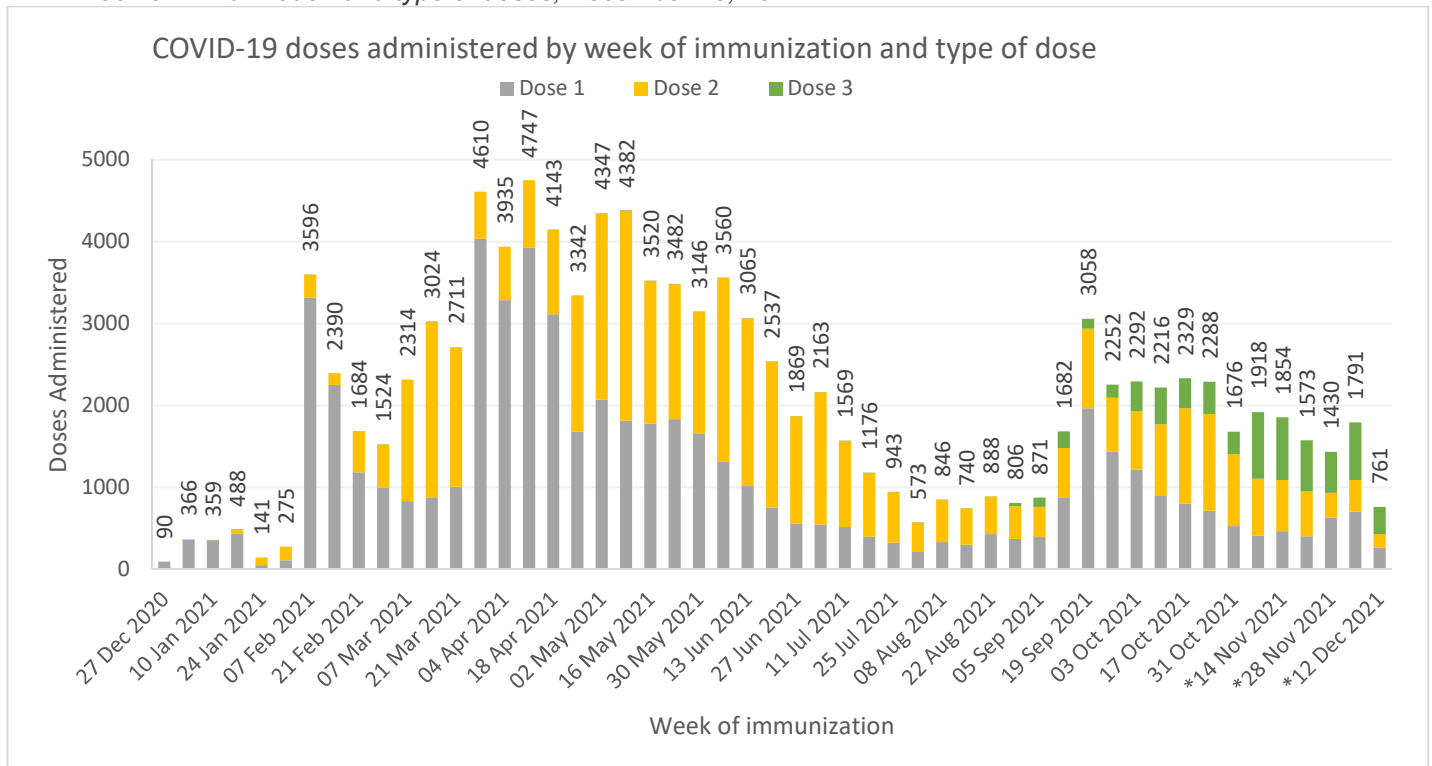
Fig 3: Rate of COVID-19 cases in First Nation Communities in Alberta and Alberta by age group



Note: *Due to late reporting and registration of birth, the rate in this age group is not calculated for First Nations communities.

There is a higher burden of COVID-19 cases in First Nations in Alberta compared to the general Alberta population in every age group.

Fig 4: COVID-19 Vaccine doses administered to First Nations people living in First Nation communities in Alberta by week of immunization and type of doses, December 15, 2021



*May be incomplete due to late reporting and data entry

A total of 107,342 COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered to 55,728 people living in First Nations communities in Alberta, of whom 45,304 have received at least two doses and 6,310 have received three doses.