

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19):

Bulletin to First Nations in Alberta: February 5, 2021

Office of the Senior Medical Officer of Health

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

ISC-AB is pleased that Moderna vaccine allocations for the 65 years of age and over on-reserve population is expected to be distributed to communities during the week of February 8. Vaccines are a key component in protecting yourself, your family, and community. As communities are preparing for vaccine clinics, they may wish to consider how they will approach vaccine hesitancy from community members. Vaccine hesitancy can occur for a number of reasons, such as being unsure of the benefits of the vaccine, the ability for it to actually prevent disease or its safety, in addition to the historical and present experiences that First Nation populations have lived through when accessing the healthcare system. A community-led approach to address vaccine hesitancy could be beneficial and an ISC Medical Officer of Health would be happy to meet with Nations to discuss any vaccine questions. Also, there are vaccine information resources available on [OneHealth](#), as well as, ["Vaccine Hesitancy and First Nations, Inuit and Métis Populations"](#) available on the National Collaborating Centre for Infectious Diseases website.

Status Update

Number of Cases Reported* as of February 5, 2021:

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

Alberta: There are **6,588 Active Cases** of COVID-19 in Alberta.

	Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada)	First Nations On Reserve in Canada (Indigenous Services Canada)	Alberta (Alberta Health)
Confirmed Cases	793,734	17,486	125,672
Deaths	20,513	175	1684
Recovered	725,507	15,477	117,400

First Nations living on and off reserve (Alberta): There are **10,756** confirmed cases of COVID-19 to date and **90** deaths in First Nations living on and off reserve in Alberta. Confirmed cases are: **1864** in Calgary Zone; **2756** in Edmonton Zone; **689** in South Zone; **2987** in North Zone; **2446** in Central zone and **14** unknown. *Further Information:* 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:

599 Active Cases	4694 Recovered	47 Deaths	68 Currently Hospitalized	38 Communities with Active Cases
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Location (By Zone)	Confirmed Cases	Active Cases	Recovered
Calgary Zone	985	110	866
South Zone	395	66	325
Central Zone	1643	182	1446
Edmonton Zone	366	16	342
North Zone	1951	225	1715
TOTAL	5340	599	4694



Testing in Alberta – Update

- As of February 5, 2021, the total number of reported swab samples collected to date in First Nation communities in Alberta is **79,090**.
- **Testing continues to be a powerful tool to help limit the spread.** If you have symptoms, please stay home and book a testing appointment.
- Priority testing continues to be available to:
 - Any person exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19
 - All close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases
 - Anyone linked to a known outbreak
- **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

- **[New]** Alberta Health has confirmed that a total of 10,000 doses of Moderna vaccine will be provided for **first doses** for First Nations persons living on-reserve who are 65 years of age or older. The vaccine is expected to be received in Alberta February 6-7 and will be forwarded to Nations during the week of February 8, 2021. These doses are for first doses only, so please use them for first doses and do not save them as second doses, as second doses will be coming in early March.
- **[New]** The vaccine allocation for each Nation is based on the number of individuals living on-reserve who are 65 years of age or older. This information was provided to FNIHB by each Nation and was incorporated into a regional vaccine plan. Alberta Health indicated that each Nation can determine how they wish to use their allocated doses – if they wish to offer vaccine to a different subset of their community, they can do so.
- **[New]** Vaccine depots will receive and distribute the COVID-19 vaccine and have been in communication with communities. Communities can identify the date they would like to receive the vaccine and will have 30 days to administer the doses from the date the vaccine was removed from the freezer at the vaccine depot.
- **[New]** Currently, there is no new information available regarding Phase 2, but information will be shared as it becomes available.
- **[New]** The two COVID-19 vaccines currently licensed in Canada are mRNA vaccines. More information on how mRNA vaccines work can be found [here](#). In addition, Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority created two COVID-19 Vaccine whiteboard videos, [How the COVID-19 Vaccine Works](#) and [Information about the Moderna Vaccine](#).
- **[New]** ISC-AB will continue to support information sharing on clinics and best practices in the coming weeks. A number of resources are available on [OneHealth](#), including a clinic planning guide and checklist.
- **Reminder:** AB 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](#).
- **Reminder:** ISC hosts a vaccine information session every Tuesday from 1-2 pm. These will be hosted by Dr. Parminder Thiara and Christina Smith.
- **Reminder:** Alberta Health Services has created an [FAQ](#) on the COVID-19 vaccine. Individuals can also fill out an online form to get their questions answered.
- **Reminder:** ISC has launched a [COVID-19 vaccine page](#) that will be updated regularly.
- **Reminder:** Vaccination is a personal choice. Public health experts agree vaccines are safe, help prevent serious disease, and protect you, your family and your community. Learn about the [approval process for vaccines](#) and [what you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine for Canada](#) (for the Cree version click [here](#)). In addition, The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) [website](#) is updated regularly and is an excellent resource.

Alberta's Relaunch- Update

- **[New]** Easing of province-wide health measures will occur in steps based on COVID-19 hospitalization benchmarks. These steps and benchmarks will provide a transparent approach to easing restrictions for businesses and individuals while protecting the health-care system. Each

step has an associated benchmark of hospitalized COVID-19 patients, including intensive care patients. Changes to restrictions will be considered once a benchmark is reached. Alberta will move to Step 1 on February 8, which will include easing of restrictions for indoor/outdoor children's sport/performance; indoor personal fitness that is one-on-one and by appointment only; and restaurants, cafes and pubs. For more information please click [here](#).

- **[New]** The province has expanded their COVID-19 isolation supports to all Albertans – including First Nations living both on and off reserve, and individuals living on Métis Settlements. Upon referral by AHS, individuals who must isolate or quarantine and cannot do so safely at home are eligible for free hotel accommodation and culturally appropriate food, as well as other supports. Individuals are asked to call 211 to request access to an isolation hotel and can access a [FAQ](#) or more information [here](#).
- **Reminder:** ISC-AB has developed several resources to support communities during COVID-19, which are available on [OneHealth](#). ISC-AB Medical Officers of Health (MOHs) and Environmental Public Health Officers (EPHOs) continue to be available to provide public health support.

COVID-19 Variants

- **[New]** As of February 1, 2021, Alberta has detected **50** cases of the variant first identified in the United Kingdom (B.1.1.7), and **7** cases of the variant first identified in South Africa (B.1.351)
- **[New]** Current evidence suggests these variants of concern are more contagious and can spread more easily than the original COVID-19 strain.
- **[New]** While it is not yet clear whether these new variants tend to cause more severe illness, there is concern about the impacts if they become common in our communities. The increased spread of COVID-19 would result in more illness, hospitalizations and deaths.
- **[New]** The Government of Alberta announced that should a person test positive for a COVID-19 variant, and choose to stay in their own home to isolate (isolating in a different location, such as an isolation facility/hotel is encouraged), **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. More information on COVID variants can be found [here](#).

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

- **[New]** Recognizing the long term mental health impacts of the COVID pandemic, the Alberta Region is actively engaged with National to secure additional Mental Wellness COVID funding. ISC-AB will continue to work with communities to identify funding availability as needs arise. Maximizing on regional pressures funding, and COVID Mental Health funding, ISC Alberta will flow approximately \$13 million into community-based mental health related activities.
- **[New]** Should a community need a vaccine fridge that protects against power outages, please reach out to your Community Liaison Team member who can provide you with further information on ISC support that is available.
- **Reminder:** ISC is allocating an additional \$380 million for the Indigenous Community Support Fund (ICSF3). Funding can be used for a variety of measures, such as promoting food security, improving mental health support services and ensuring the distribution of emergency equipment.
- **Reminder:** Over these next 2 years, \$631.6 million will support a number of measures in communities including procuring PPE, adapting existing facilities, hiring more staff, and providing surge capacity when needed. An additional \$186.8 million over 2 years is going towards supporting needs and gaps in long-term care facilities and providing additional homecare in communities.

Mental Health and Wellness- Update

- **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. They are open on Saturday and Sunday's from 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm, in addition to their regular hours Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. 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=IwAR1hzie9aLgDLr0K7Qi80mb9ozNby5dK6VZO3CFhhKqLrALUpo6_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>

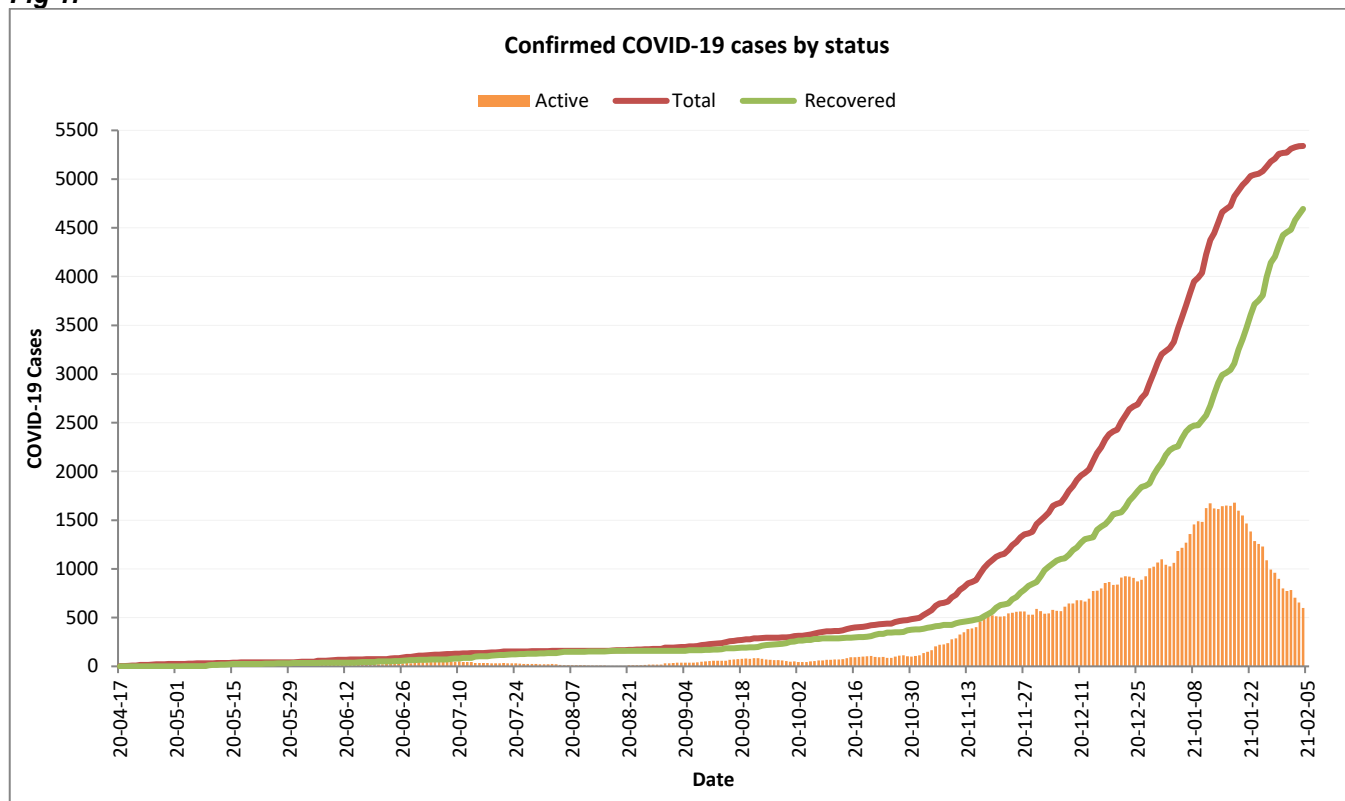
Mental health and coping resources are available for individuals who are struggling or need a little extra support.

- 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.

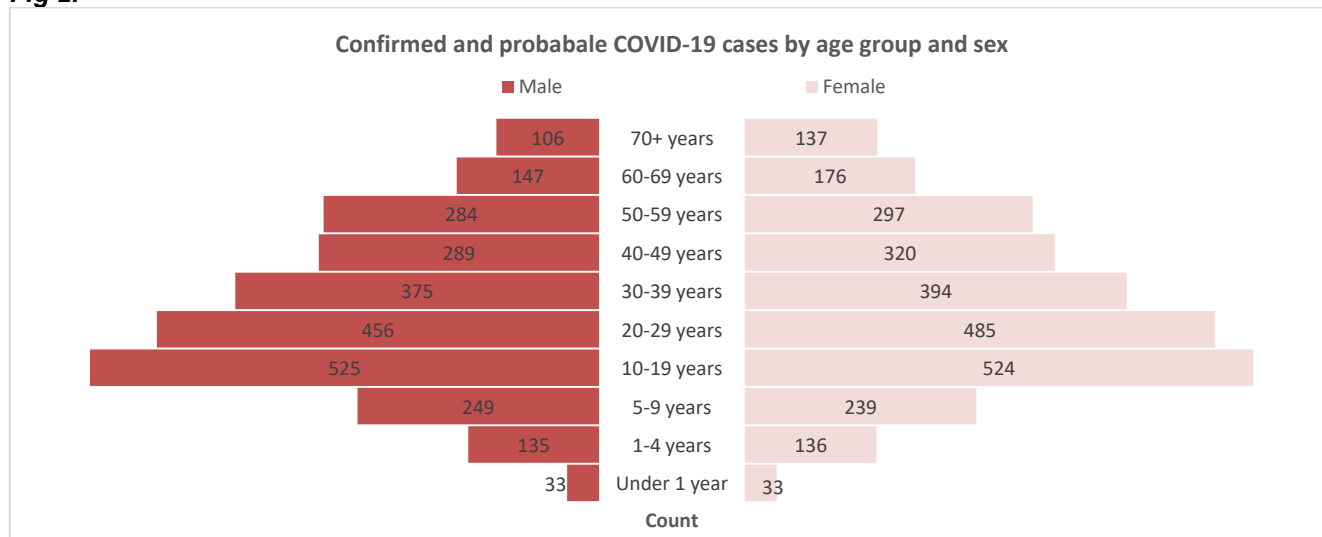
APPENDIX A: *Additional COVID-19 Data in First Nations On-Reserve in Alberta*

Fig 1.



The number of active cases in First Nations communities increased from 3 on April 17th to 29 on May 8th and then gradually decreased to 8 on May 30th. Thereafter, the number of active cases began to increase again peaking at 54 on July 7th followed by a period of decline in active cases until August 17th. As of August 17th, there was a relatively slow increase in active cases up until November 2nd when cases began increasing more rapidly to a high of 1681 active cases on January 18th. The number of active cases have been decreasing since January 18th. At the time of reporting, there were a total of 5340 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in First Nations communities in Alberta out of which 599 cases are currently active and 4694 have recovered.

Fig 2.



Half (51.7%) of all cases occurred among individuals between the ages of 10 and 39 years. Females accounted for 50.9% of cases in this age group.