

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19):

Bulletin to First Nations in Alberta: January 13, 2022

Office of the Senior Medical Officer of Health

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

The Omicron variant (B.1.1.529) continues to spread rapidly in Alberta. The Omicron surge has required us to modify our pandemic response efforts as we look to move away from identifying and managing every case or contact. The increased demand for PCR tests has impacted laboratory capacity, PCR appointment availability, and timely notification of results to patients. In response, the province has modified the [PCR testing eligibility](#) to focus on those who have risk factors for severe outcomes and those who live and work in high-risk settings. PCR testing remains available on-reserve, however, efforts should focus on high risk individuals and settings, such as congregate care. PCR testing of all symptomatic individuals and contacts is not as important when the risk of transmission is so widespread. Individuals are encouraged to use the [Rapid Antigen Tests](#) (RATs), if available, to help detect COVID-19 infections early and stop the spread. The Omicron variant is so widespread right now that, if you have COVID-19 symptoms such as a stuffy or runny nose, cough, fever, sore throat, or loss of sense of smell or taste, you should assume you have COVID-19 and are legally required to isolate. Please stay home and away from others for 5 or 10 days depending on your vaccination status, or until your symptoms improve, whichever is longer. Detailed information on isolation requirements can be found [here](#).

We continue to encourage you to take efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19 in your communities. Vaccination, in combination with public health and individual protective measures, offer the best and most robust protection against serious illness due to COVID-19. A booster shot offers the best protection from infection and severe illness from the Omicron variant. All individuals 18 years old and older in Alberta are urged to get their booster as soon as possible, providing that it has been 5 months since their second shot. Although the news of Omicron is not how we were all expecting to start 2022, we would like to wish you a Happy New Year with high hopes that this wave, although frustrating, will have minimal serious outcomes and be kept at bay given our collective efforts.

Number of Cases Reported* as of January 12, 2022:

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

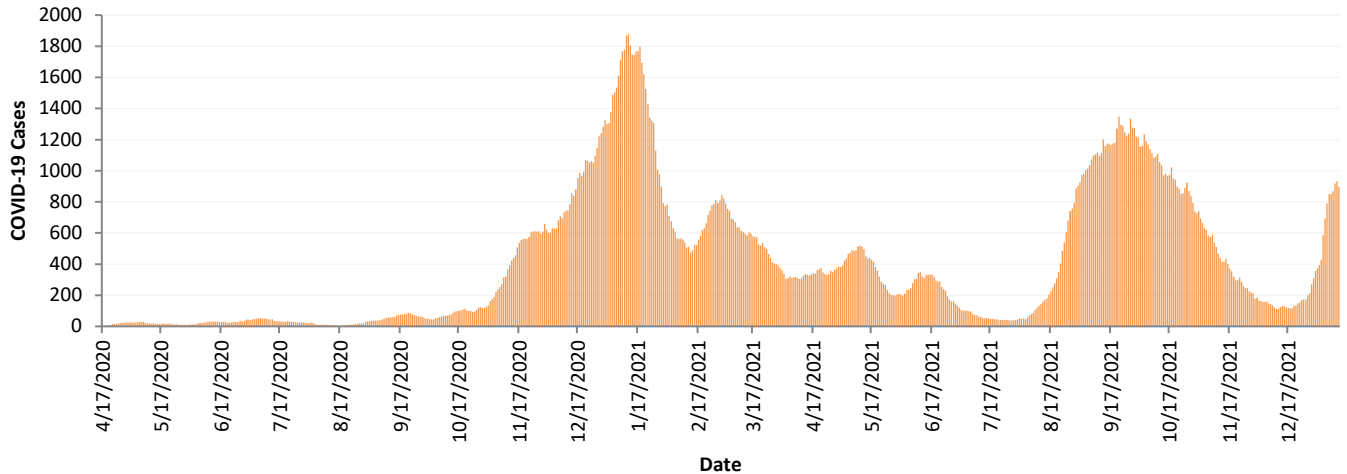
Alberta: There are **61,229 Active Cases** of COVID-19 in Alberta.

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	15,467	14,422	896	149	17	27
Living on and off reserve in Alberta	31,109	28,691	2,139	279	52	NA



Active confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases by date, January 12, 2022



COVID-19 in First Nations living on reserve in Alberta

Treaty Area	Total Cases	Active Cases	Recovered Cases	Deaths
Treaty 6	7,016	387	6,572	57
Treaty 7	3,842	357	3,430	55
Treaty 8	4,609	152	4,420	37
TOTAL	15,467	896	14,422	149

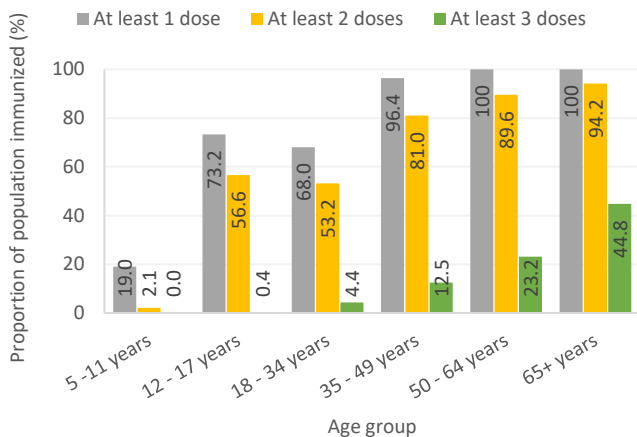
COVID-19 Vaccine

COVID-19 Vaccine in First Nations people living on reserve in Alberta as of January 12, 2022.

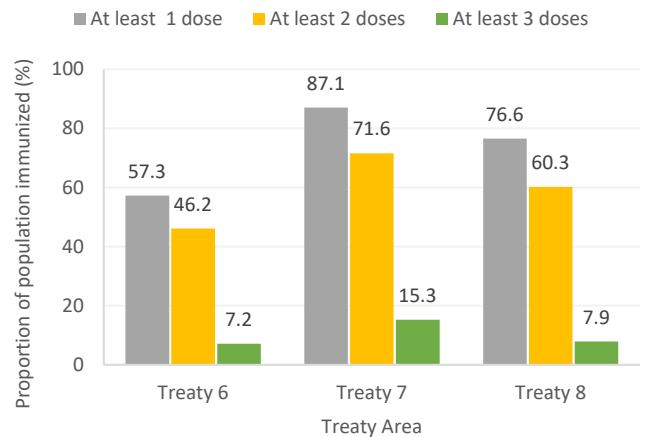
- 111,103 doses have been administered to First Nations living on-reserve in Alberta.
- 57,218 First Nations people living on reserve have received at least one dose
- 46,103 First Nations people living on reserve have received at least two doses
- 7,782 First Nations people living on reserve have received three doses

Approximately 86.2% of the population aged 12 years and older living on reserve have received at least one dose (71.5% of the total population), 71.9% have received at least two doses (57.6% of the total population), and 12.2% have received three doses (9.7% of the total population).

Proportion* of population immunized by age group and type of dose



Proportion* of total population immunized by Treaty area and type of dose



*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

COVID-19 Vaccine - New Developments

- **[New]** A third dose of COVID-19 vaccine is available at least 8 weeks after second dose for individuals aged 12 and older **who are immunocompromised**. See here for a list of [eligible immunocompromised conditions](#).
- **[New]** Everyone aged 18 and older can get a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine 5 months after their second dose. Individuals who received 2 doses of AstraZeneca or one dose of Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccine can get a booster of an mRNA vaccine. Vaccine effectiveness against infection may decline over time, especially with the highly transmissible Omicron variant, but vaccines remain the best way to prevent severe illness and death. Third doses can boost immunity to improve protection against infection and severe disease and limit spread.
- **[New]** Additional doses are available for travelers or individuals who received AstraZeneca or Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) vaccines. Travellers to jurisdictions that don't recognize Covishield/AstraZeneca or mixed series doses can get additional dose(s) of vaccine at least 4 weeks after second dose.
- **Reminder:** Children ages 5-11 are also eligible for vaccination. An 8 week interval between the first and second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for children aged 5 – 11. Contact your local health centre for more information or to book an appointment. Further information on pediatric vaccination is available [here](#).

COVID-19 Testing

- **[New]** First Nations communities requiring at-home test kits can email rapidtesting@gov.ab.ca. The province has indicated that additional supply of at-home rapid test kits has been delayed, however requests can still be submitted.
- **[New]** Storing and using at home rapid tests at the right temperature is important in order for them to function properly. Please keep kits above 2°C. Watch this [video](#) to learn more about how to perform a rapid test at home.
- **[New]** To Find out what to do if you get a positive, negative, or invalid rapid antigen test result, refer to [Rapid testing at home | Alberta.ca](#).
- **Reminder:** Employers and service providers can apply to receive free rapid test kits for use in their organization's COVID-19 screening program. More information on the rapid testing program for employers and service providers can be found [here](#).

Alberta's Relaunch - Update

- **[New]** Effective January 3, [isolation and quarantine requirements](#) have changed as follows:
 - Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 with [core symptoms](#) that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition:
 - If fully vaccinated (2 doses or 1 dose Janssen – Johnson & Johnson) are required to isolate immediately for 5 days from the start of symptoms or until they resolve, whichever is longer, notify all close contacts from the previous 48 hours; and for 5 days following isolation, wear a mask at all times when around others outside of home.
 - If not fully vaccinated (1 dose or less) are required to isolate immediately for 10 days from the start of symptoms or until they resolve, whichever is longer, if symptoms are not related to a pre-existing condition or health condition; notify all close contacts and wear a mask.
 - Close contacts of positive cases are no longer legally required to quarantine for 14 days but are strongly encouraged to follow the [isolation and quarantine requirements](#).
 - [Federal border measures](#) still apply for all international travellers entering Canada.
- **[New]** The following restrictions for social gatherings were updated in December as follows:
 - Indoor private social gatherings are limited to a maximum of 10 people 18 and older. There are no limits on people 17 and under if accompanied by their parent or guardian. If attending the gathering by themselves, they will count towards the maximum limit of 10 people. The indoor gathering restriction does not apply to mutual support groups, or to workers who need to access your home to provide caregiving support or home repairs and maintenance.
 - Indoor wedding ceremonies and funeral services are permitted with up to 50 people or 50% of fire code occupancy, whichever is less, unless the hosting facility implements the Restrictions Exemption Program (REP).

- Indoor wedding and funeral receptions are prohibited, unless the hosting facility implements the REP.
- Outdoor private social gatherings remain limited to a maximum of 20 people, with 2 metre physical distancing between households at all times
- Outdoor ceremonies, services and receptions are permitted with up to 200 people and must follow liquor sales and consumption restrictions.
- Albertans should refrain from workplace social gatherings.
- **[New]** Masks are mandatory in all indoor public spaces, workplaces and places of worship, including eligible businesses that implement the Restriction Exemption Program; for employees in all indoor work settings, except while alone in work station; and for all students in Grades 4 and up, plus staff and teachers in all grades. Masks should fit well and be of high quality. People at risk of severe outcomes should wear medical masks when in settings with people outside of their household.
- **[New]** On December 24, new limits on large venues came into effect for restaurants, indoor and outdoor entertainment, event and recreation facilities, businesses that implement REP, and businesses that do not implement REP. More information on updated restrictions for businesses can be found [here](#).

Steps Individuals Can Take

- If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you can assume you have COVID-19 and likely the Omicron variant. You do not need to be tested to confirm, but you can use an at-home rapid test if you have access to one. Most people recover from COVID-19 without special treatment and can manage mild symptoms at home. Resources are available to help you manage mild symptoms at home and take care of someone who has COVID-19. AHS has developed a [COVID-19 Self-Care Guide](#) if you need further information on how to manage COVID-19 at home. In addition, the Alberta Medical Association has [Patient Resources for COVID-19](#) available on their website that can help determine when you may need to talk to your doctor. It is not always necessary to get in touch with your doctor, as most people with mild symptoms can manage at home with no problems. Please have a look at the resources available to you if you are feeling sick, to know what best to do.
- To limit the spread of the variant, it is important to remain cautious and follow public health measures such as mask wearing indoors, physical distancing and proper hand washing. The following actions can be taken to decrease the rate of transmission of the Omicron variant in First Nation communities:
 - Getting fully immunized, including a booster dose as soon as you are eligible.
 - Avoiding gatherings and limit social contacts as much as possible. Consider anyone you encounter to be a potential source of Omicron.
 - If you are sick, stay home and follow the isolation requirements.
 - Wearing the best mask available, in the right size, so it covers your nose and mouth.
 - Mask recommendations for the general population have recently changed in Alberta. Individuals are encouraged to use medical masks. If medical masks are not available, individuals are encouraged to use the best mask available.
 - For healthcare workers, N95 masks are recommended for use when treating suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients.
 - Practicing good hygiene, including regular hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes.

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

- **Reminder:** The Alberta Indigenous Virtual Care Clinic (AIVCC) has updated their hours and they are now **open until 8:30pm on Wednesdays**. 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=IwAR1hzie9aLgDLr0K7Qi80mb9ozNby5dK6VZO3CFhhKgLrALUpo6_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>

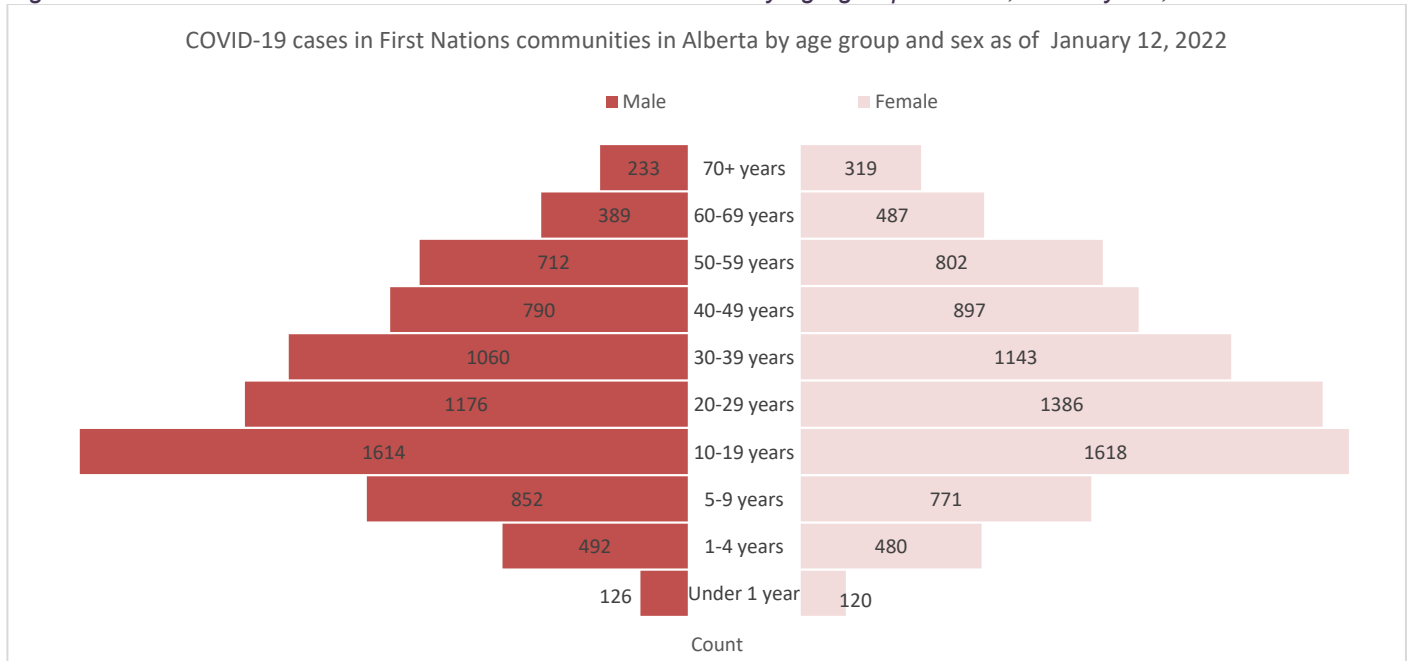
Mental health and coping resources are available for individuals who are struggling or need a little extra support.

- 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.

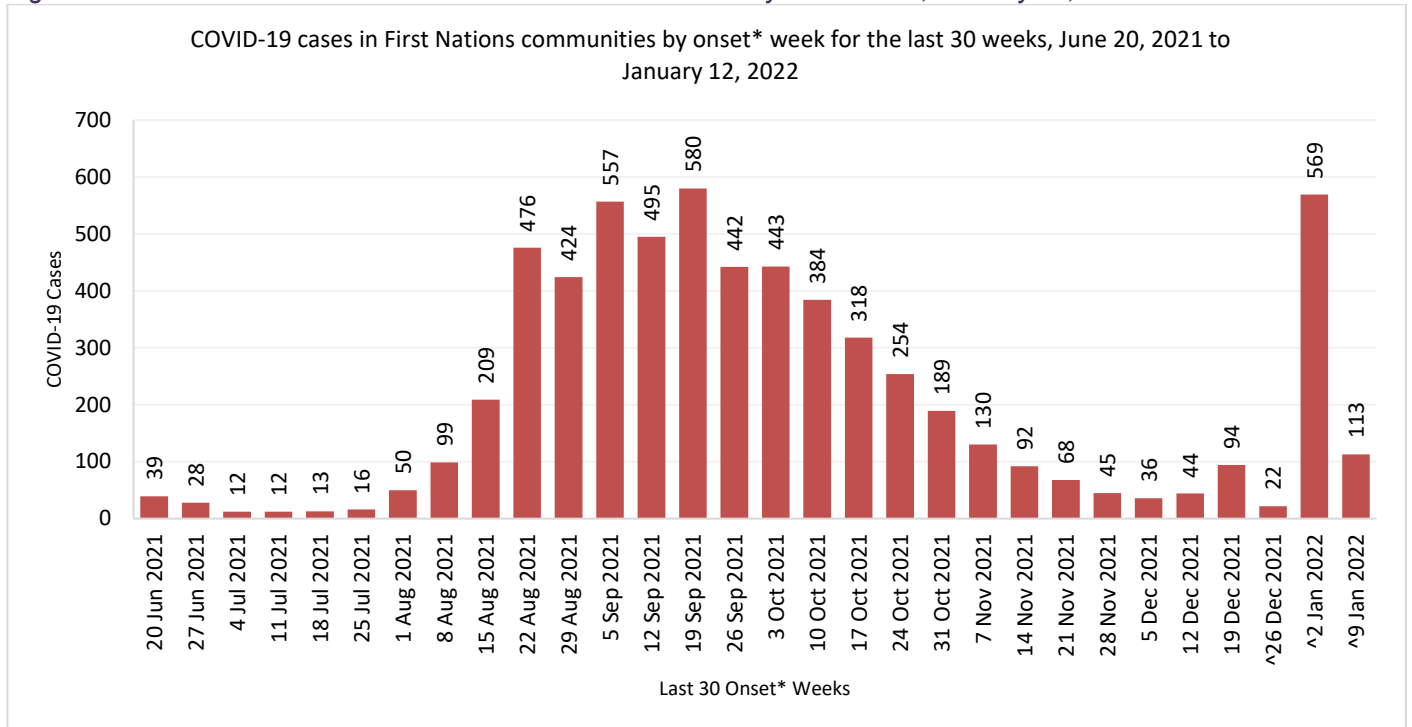
APPENDIX A: Additional COVID-19 Data in First Nations On-Reserve in Alberta

Fig 1. COVID-19 cases in First Nations communities in Alberta by age group and sex, January 12, 2022



Individuals between the ages of 10 and 39 years accounted for 51.7% of all cases in First Nations communities in Alberta and 51.2% of all cases in Alberta. Females accounted for 51.9% of all cases in First Nations communities in Alberta and 50.4% among all Albertans.

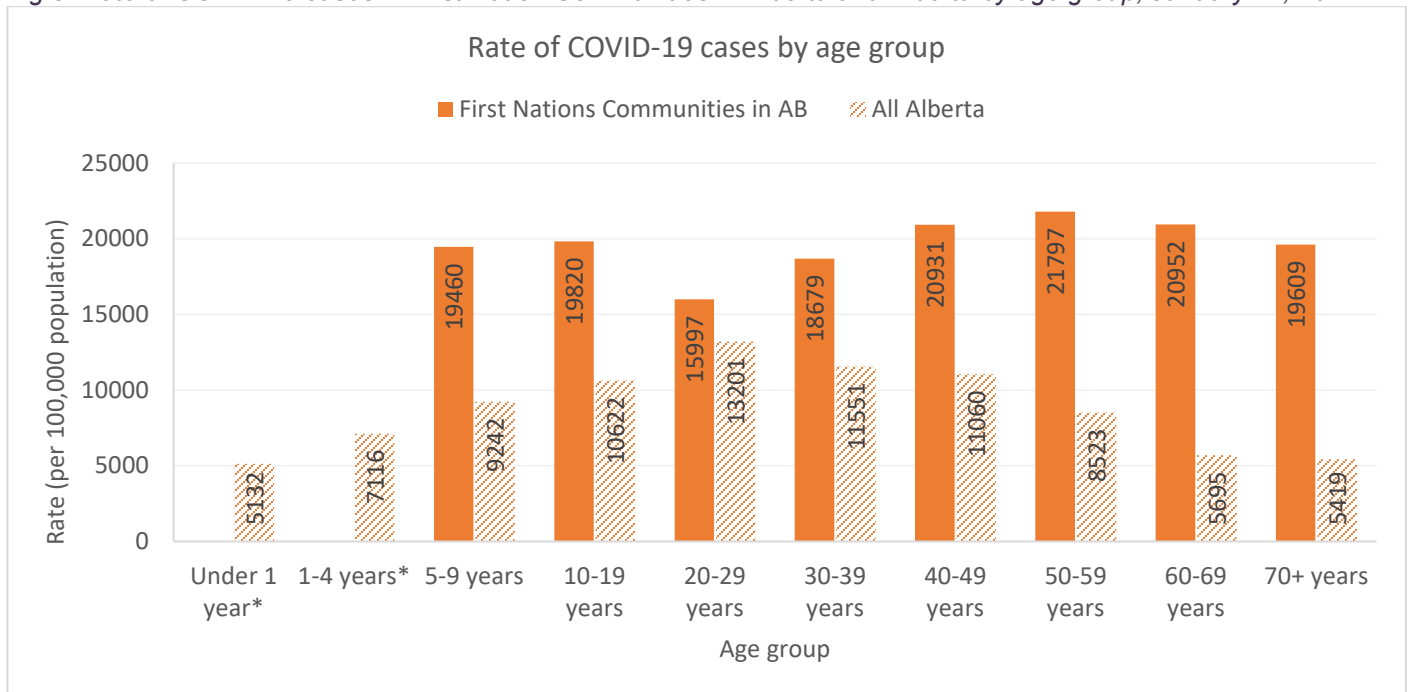
Fig 2. COVID-19 cases in First Nations communities in Alberta by onset week, January 12, 2022



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.

A significant increase in the number of COVID-19 cases are seen in January 2022 compared to December 2021 in First Nation communities in Alberta. The increase is mainly due to the spread of the COVID-19 Omicron variant.

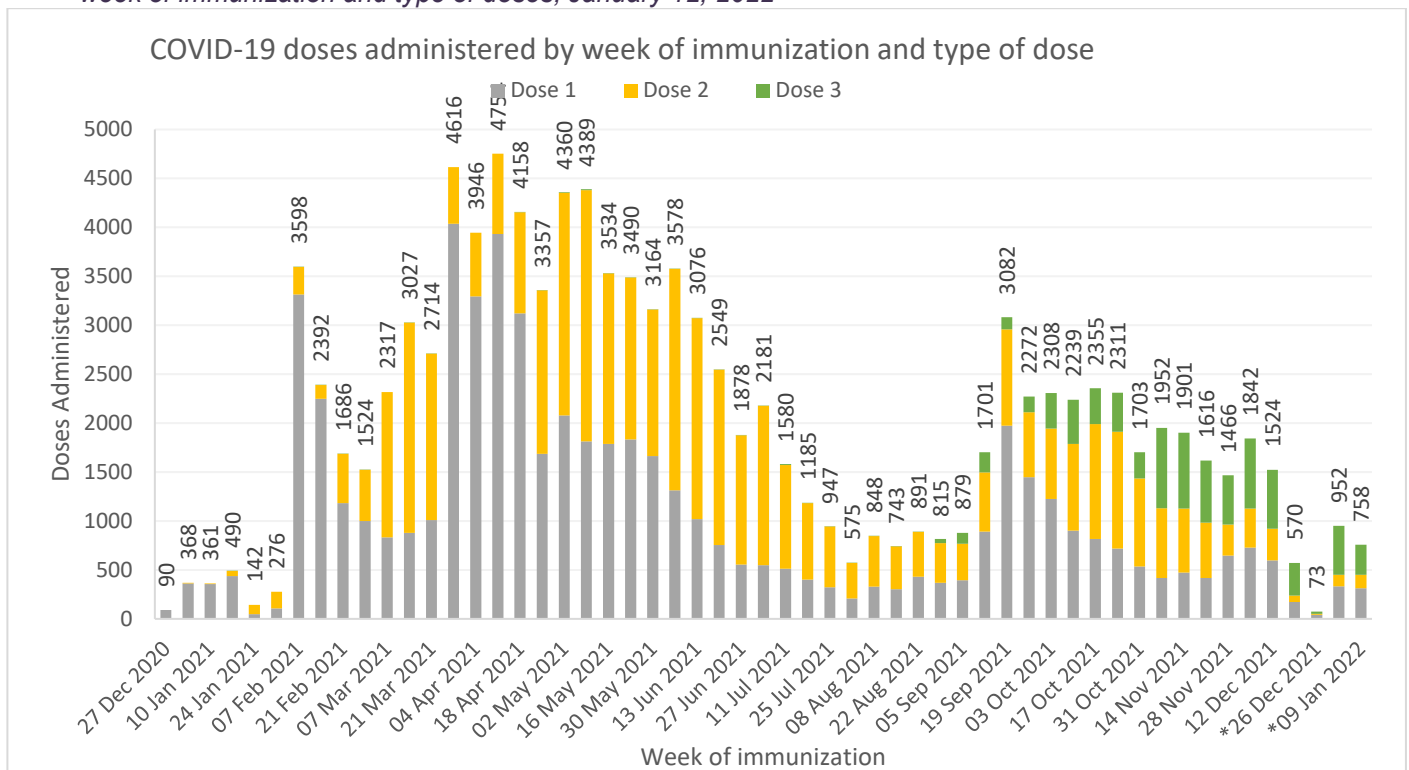
Fig 3: Rate of COVID-19 cases in First Nation Communities in Alberta and Alberta by age group, January 12, 2022



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, January 12, 2022



*May be incomplete due to late reporting and data entry

A total of 111,103 COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered to 57,218 people living in First Nations communities in Alberta, of whom 46,103 have received at least two doses and 7,782 have received three doses.