

# Novel coronavirus (COVID-19):

## Bulletin to First Nations in Alberta: March 19, 2021

Office of the Senior Medical Officer of Health

Please email questions about COVID-19 to: [sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca](mailto:sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca)

### COVID-19 Vaccines Currently Available in Canada

In Canada, the four authorized COVID-19 vaccines are mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) and non-replicating viral vector vaccines (AstraZeneca and Janssen Pharmaceuticals). All four of these vaccines are effective at reducing the severity of COVID outcomes and hospitalizations. mRNA vaccines teach our cells how to make a protein that will trigger an immune response, which then causes our body to make antibodies. These antibodies help us fight the infection if the real virus does enter our body in the future. Viral vector vaccines use a modified version of a different harmless virus (the vector) to deliver important instructions to our cells. For COVID-19 viral vector vaccines, the vector will enter a cell in our body and then use the cell's machinery to produce a harmless piece of the virus that causes COVID-19. This piece is known as a spike protein and it is only found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. The cell displays the spike protein on its surface, and our immune system recognizes it doesn't belong there, which triggers our immune system to produce antibodies. Neither type of vaccine can give someone COVID-19, nor affect or interact with our DNA in any way. Both types of vaccines are effective at protecting individuals against COVID-19, in addition to following public health measures.

### Status Update

#### Number of Cases Reported\* as of March 19, 2021:

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

**Alberta:** There are **5,084 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	922,848	23,589	140,127
Deaths	22,590	266	1,957
Recovered	870,978	22,172	133,086

**First Nations living on and off reserve (Alberta):** There are **13,140** confirmed cases of COVID-19 to date and **130** deaths in First Nations living on and off reserve in Alberta. Confirmed cases are: **2,116** in Calgary Zone; **3,106** in Edmonton Zone; **1,031** in South Zone; **4,292** in North Zone; **2,585** in Central zone and **10** 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:

448 Active Cases	6949 Recovered	71 Deaths	34 Currently Hospitalized	28 Communities with Active Cases
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Location (By Zone)	Confirmed Cases	Active Cases	Recovered
Calgary Zone	1093	24	1055
South Zone	616	73	534
Central Zone	1852	24	1810
Edmonton Zone	390	5	377
North Zone	2998	322	2654
TOTAL	6949	448	6430



Indigenous Services  
Canada

Services aux  
Autochtones Canada

Canada

## Testing in Alberta – Update

- As of March 14, 2021, the total number of reported swab samples collected to date in First Nation communities in Alberta is **90,494**.
- **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 individuals 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](mailto:sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca)

## Vaccine Watch

### COVID-19 Vaccine in First Nations Communities in Alberta as of March 18, 2021

- **15,050** doses has been delivered to First Nations communities in Alberta
- **14,047** doses have been administered in **46** Nations (bands) in Alberta
- **9,540** First Nations people living on reserve have received at least one dose
- **4,507** First Nations people living on reserve are fully immunized (2 doses)
- **3,102** First Nations people aged 65 years and older living on reserve have received their first dose.
- **2,075** First Nations people aged 65 years and older living on reserve are fully immunized (2 doses)

## New Developments

1. Phase 2A has started and includes First Nations people aged 50 and over living on or off reserve. Community health nurses can now reach out to their vaccine depot and arrange for the delivery of their vaccine for the week of March 29, 2021 (or earlier if indicated by the vaccine depot). First Nations, Métis or Inuit individuals living off-reserve or off-settlement can [book online](#), call 811 or book at a [participating pharmacy](#).
2. Many countries that initially paused the distribution of the AstraZeneca vaccine over a small number of reports of blood clots have resumed AstraZeneca vaccinations. Officials from the World Health Organization have stated there is no causal relationship established between the vaccine and health problems reported and the European Medicines Agency have concluded the vaccine is safe and effective after their initial investigations.
3. AstraZeneca has an efficacy rate of approximately 65% based on a number of studies. AstraZeneca has also been shown to reduce hospitalizations and severe outcomes related to COVID-19 by almost 100%.
4. The AstraZeneca vaccine is now being offered to Albertans aged 50 to 64 and Indigenous peoples aged 35 to 49 should they not wish to wait a couple of months to receive the mRNA vaccine (either Pfizer or Moderna vaccine). While AstraZeneca is safe and effective, NACI recommends prioritizing the mRNA vaccines for those at highest risk of severe illness and death and those with highest risk of exposure to COVID-19. NACI has now expanded its recommendation for the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine to people over the age of 18, now including those 65 years of age and over; however, this likely will not change vaccination plans in Alberta.
5. Moderna is the vaccine available in Alberta First Nations. This vaccine has proven highly effective. Moderna is also testing a booster vaccine for use against the variants, and clinical trials are under way in children.
6. In First Nation communities, Nations are completing administration of the second dose of vaccines that were administered in early February.
7. Phase 2B is expected to begin sometime in April. Any First Nations person 18-64 years old with an [eligible chronic condition](#) (including cancer, diabetes, immunosuppression and more) would be eligible for vaccine in [Phase 2B](#).

## Reminders

1. Based on emerging evidence of the protection provided by the first dose of a two dose series for COVID-19 vaccines authorized in Canada, [NACI](#) recommends that in the case of limited COVID-19 vaccine supply, jurisdictions should maximize the number of individuals benefiting from the first dose of vaccine by extending the interval for the second dose of vaccine up to 4 months.

2. Starting March 10, 2021, in Alberta, anyone who books 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. The 4 month interval between first and second doses will commence in First Nations communities for Phase 2A.
3. A new [biological page](#) for the COVID-19 Vaccine (mRNA) – Moderna frozen vaccine has been posted by Alberta Health to include the recommended spacing considerations between COVID-19 vaccine and tuberculin skin testing.
4. 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.
5. 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](#).
6. ISC-AB hosts a vaccine information session every Tuesday from 1-2 pm.
7. Alberta Health Services has created an [FAQ](#) on the COVID-19 vaccine.
8. ISC has launched a [COVID-19 vaccine page](#) that will be updated regularly.

### ***Alberta's Relaunch- Update***

- **[New]** Alberta has fully moved into Step 2 and [updated health measures](#) are now in place for retail, hotels and community halls, performance groups, and youth sports, performance and recreation. These changes are in addition to the Step 2 measures announced on March 1, as pressure eases on the health system and hospitalizations remain well below 450.
- **Reminder:** A decision on [Step 3](#) will be made after at least three weeks of evaluation to assess the spread of COVID-19. Metrics based on cases and growth, including variant cases, are being monitored and will also be used to guide any decisions around further steps or restrictions.

### ***COVID-19 Variants of Concern***

- As of March 18, 2021, Alberta has detected **1,169** cases of the variant first identified in the United Kingdom (B.1.1.7), **17** cases of the variant first identified in South Africa (B.1.351) and **2** cases of the variant first identified in Brazil (P.1).
- **Reminder:** The [COVID-19 variants](#) are more infectious, causing it to spread more easily. 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 (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. An ISC-AB COVID-19 Variants Fact Sheet can be found on [OneHealth](#) under COVID-19 variants.

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

- **[New]** The Government of Canada has launched the "Vaccine Community Innovation Challenge" to encourage individuals and/or groups across Canada to help promote vaccine confidence in their communities. Twenty finalists will be chosen by an expert panel and 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 to reinvest in the protection and promotion of public health in their community. The deadline to submit a proposal is **April 9, 2021**. More information [here](#).

### ***Mental Health and Wellness***

- **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 Resources***

- **[New]** The Public Health Agency of Canada has developed a COVID-19 Vaccination Tool Kit for Health Care Providers, which can be found on the [OneHealth](#) website.

## ***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](mailto: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](mailto: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](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>

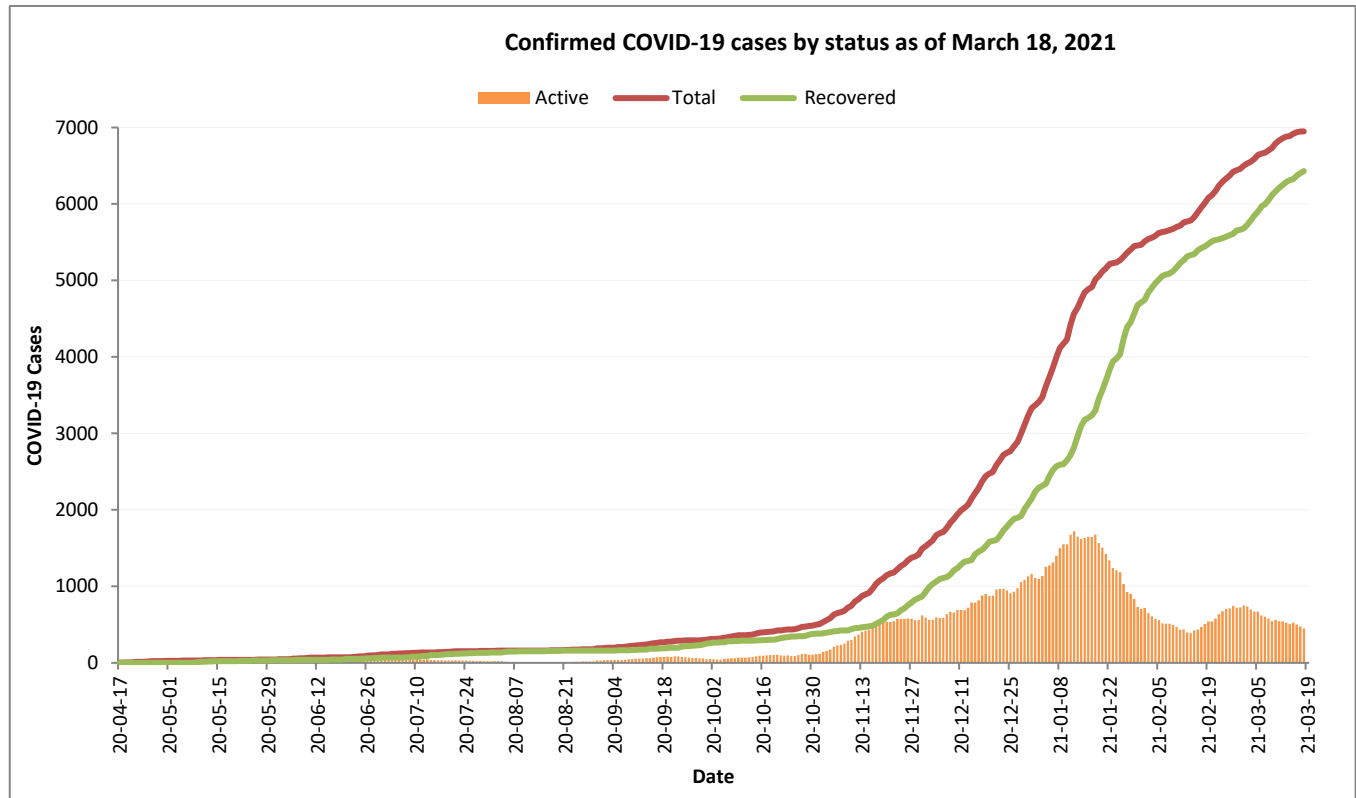
### **Mental health and coping resources are available for individuals who are struggling or need a little extra support.**

- 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.**

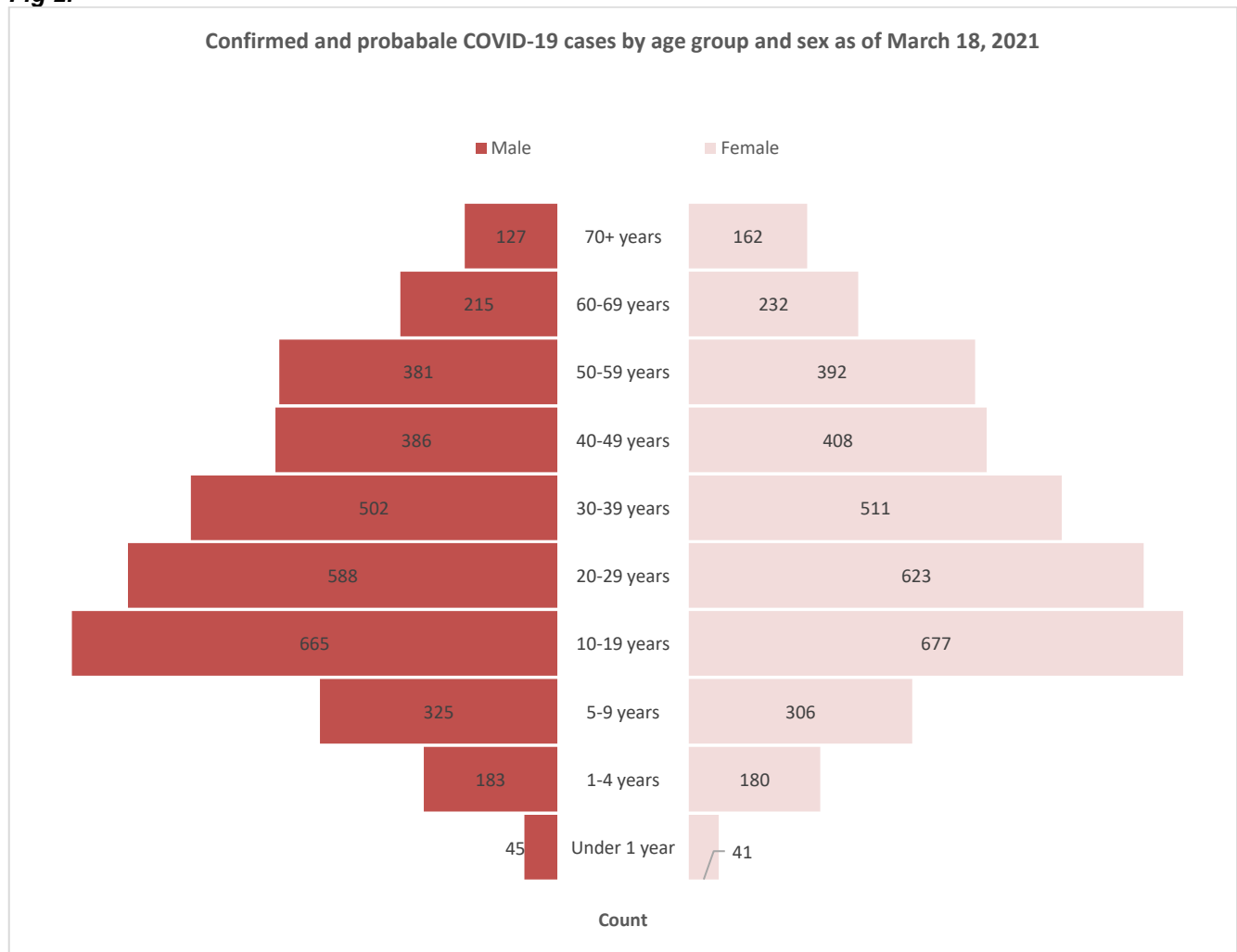
## APPENDIX A: *Additional COVID-19 Data in First Nations On-Reserve in Alberta*

**Fig 1.**



The number of active cases in First Nations communities increased from 3 on April 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 in active cases until August 17, 2020. There was a relatively slow increase in active cases there after up until November 2, 2020 when cases began increasing more rapidly to a high of 1720 active cases on January 12, 2021. The number of active decreased there after until it reached a low of 397 on February 13, 2021. The number of daily active cases increased there after reaching a peak of 750 on March 01, 2021. The number of active cases have been decreasing since March 1, 2021. At the time of reporting, there were a total of 6949 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in First Nations communities in Alberta out of which 448 cases are currently active and 6430 have recovered.

**Fig 2.**



While 51.3% of all cases among individuals living in First Nations communities in Alberta occurred between the ages of 10 and 39 years, 49.1% of all Albertans cases occurred among those ages between 10 and 39 years. Females accounted for 50.8% of all cases in First Nations communities in Alberta and 50.0% among all Albertans.