

ISC-AB Weekly Vaccine Update March 2, 2021

General Updates:

- While case numbers were trending downward, active cases are now rising on-reserve. As of March 1, 2021, there are a total of 6320 confirmed cases on-reserve, of which 660 are active in 30 First Nations communities. 5594 cases have recovered, 28 individuals are in hospital (13 in the intensive care unit) and 66 individuals have passed away.
- The new COVID-19 variants remain a concern and there are now two confirmed variant cases on-reserve in Alberta First Nations. One community in Treaty 8 and one community in Treaty 7 have confirmed the presence of B.1.1.7 on-reserve. ISC-AB is working to monitor these cases and support a community response. With the recent increase in cases and variants now present in communities, it is important to continue to follow public health measures.

Vaccine General Update:

- As of March 2, 2021, over 8300 doses of COVID-19 have been administered in Alberta First Nations. 60% of the over 65 on-reserve population and 9.2% of 18 – 64 on-reserve population have received their first dose. There continues to be some vaccine hesitancy in Alberta, but overall this initial round of vaccine clinics has been successful.
- AstraZeneca has now been approved by Health Canada and the Government of Canada is in the process of securing sources of this vaccine manufactured by AstraZeneca and from a manufacturer in India. Further information on AstraZeneca is anticipated in the coming weeks and doses may be available in Alberta as early as April 2021. For now, vaccines are mainly from Moderna.
- As preparations get underway for the next round of vaccine clinics, please report any surge capacity needs. ISC-AB continues to secure additional nursing staff to support immunizations, including nursing students from U of A. The process for getting these supports to your communities will be finalized within the next week.
- Delivery of the second doses of COVID-19 vaccine for individuals aged 65+ will be available starting next week. Please reach out to your vaccine depot this Thursday (March 4th) or Friday (March 5th) to let them know when you would like the second dose shipment of vaccine delivered. The delivery should be timed to arrive near the date that you will start to offer the second doses; the vaccine depot can hold your allocation until your health centre is ready for it. First Nations communities have been allocated the same number of vials that were shipped for the first doses for this age group.
- Communities with larger orders may decide to have the vaccine shipped in smaller allotments to match the timing of their clinics. Leaving part of the shipment at the vaccine depot in the freezer to be shipped at a later date will push back the 30 day working period that the community has to provide the immunizations and reduces the number of vials in the vaccine fridge in case there is a cold chain break. Please include your vaccine depot in this planning.
- Due to the possibility of several COVID-19 vaccine shipments being stored in the vaccine fridge at the same time, please ensure that each vaccine box is marked with the date that the vaccine must be used by. Each COVID-19 vaccine shipment should have a document that identifies the date that the vaccine was removed from the freezer, the vaccine must be used within 30 days from this date.

- To ensure that all individuals who received their first dose receive a second dose, try to arrange to have at least 10 individuals requiring a second dose scheduled for their immunization prior to opening a vial. Doses getting close to expiry can be used for first doses if needed to prevent wastage; however, the vaccine supply may diminish before all individuals receive their second dose.
- 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.
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/58d31634-61d9-469d-b95f-f714719b923e/resource/3662231b-201c-405f-8457-16c0ec4978de/download/aip-bp-covid-19-moderna.pdf>
- CHIP and AVI are two reporting processes that communities, Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, and FNIHB use to monitor how much vaccine was allocated to each community, how much is still available in each community, and who has received the vaccine. We know that both of these reporting processes take time, and we appreciate the efforts being made to keep this information up to date on a daily basis.
- Just as it is important to document each immunization given, it is just as important to document refusals. If a client is offered the COVID-19 immunization and refuses it, charting should occur on the client's chart to indicate this. In addition to the nurse's notes, there is also a check box that can be checked in CHIP to track the number of refusals for the community. Always ensure that the individual is aware that they can get the immunization in the future if they change their mind.
- PHAC is offering mini-clinic kits to support the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccines in communities. The mini clinic kit offers a range of items that would be required to run an effective clinic. FNIHB Alberta has requested a mini clinic kit for each First Nation community in Alberta. PHAC is offering to provide tables and chairs in addition to the mini clinic kit if needed. Please confirm with Cynthia Onyegbula if your community does not require a kit by March 9, 2021.

Questions:

- ***When will the doses for phase 2 arrive in communities?***
 - The current focus is on ensuring all Albertans over age 75 receive their first dose of vaccine over the next few weeks. Depending on uptake and remaining vaccines after Phase I of vaccine rollout, Phase II may begin sooner than planned. Currently, it looks there will be doses available to begin phase II in late March or early April. ISC-AB shares information as soon as we receive it.
- ***When will second doses of vaccine arrive in communities?***
 - Delivery of the second doses of COVID-19 vaccine for individuals aged 65+ will be available starting next week. Please reach out to your vaccine depot this Thursday (March 4th) or Friday (March 5th) to let them know when you would like the second dose shipment of vaccine delivered.
- ***Is the 35 day interval still recommended for providing second doses of the vaccine?***
 - Alberta Health is working to ensure second doses are available for all who received a first dose within a 42 day window. There is ongoing research and recommendations are changing as jurisdictions balance the need to vaccinate as many people as possible while also ensuring people get their second dose. As communities will receive their second doses beginning next week, there is no

need to wait for 42 days. As long as 21 days have elapsed between the first and second dose, it is ok to administer a second dose.

- ***Do we know what variants are in First Nations communities and are vaccines effective against these variants?***
 - The B.1.1.7 variant, first identified in the UK was confirmed in two communities. The UK variant is currently the most common in Alberta and there are 484 cases as of March 2, 2021. There are 8 cases of the South African variant in Alberta.
- ***What are the isolation requirements for variant cases?***
 - The isolation requirements for variant cases are longer as these cases are highly transmissible within households. If anyone in your household has the variant case, you will have to quarantine for 14 days from the time you were exposed. If you continue to isolate with an individual who is confirmed positive, you will need to isolate 14 days after last exposure. If they are symptomatic for 10 days, you are required to isolate a further 14 days, 24 days in total. Due to the higher risk with variants, isolation for those who test positive is recommended outside the home.
- ***How is the Region informing First Nations when there are cases/exposures from off-reserve or other Nations coming into communities?***
 - ISC-AB works closely with communities when there are potential exposures or COVID-19 outbreaks. When there are known cases coming onto reserve, ISC-AB informs the health team and works to ensure contact tracing and case management are in place. Should there be a variant case on-reserve, leadership may also be informed. We recognize this can be complicated by travel between Nations.
- ***Is there any tracking of positive COVID-19 cases after receiving the vaccine?***
 - ISC-AB and AHS are currently not tracking these events, though there have been reports that individuals have been infected with COVID-19 after receiving the vaccine in other countries. This is extremely rare and will be reported if it occurs.
- ***Will First Nations continue to receive Moderna vaccine or start receiving newly approved vaccines such as AstraZeneca?***
 - Second doses for communities will be Moderna and in the coming months, Moderna will continue to make up the majority of vaccines available in the Region.
- ***Would refusal to be vaccinated be considered private and confidential information? What is the point of tracking vaccine refusals?***
 - Tracking refusals to take the vaccine is very helpful in planning future clinics and keeping track of who has been vaccinated in community. This data also shows you have done your due diligence and made the vaccine available to those who are prioritized before moving onto other populations. Tracking refusals helps show where there is hesitancy, and may ensure those who refused are offered the vaccine again should they change their mind. There are no privacy concerns as the only reporting that goes to ISC-AB and AHS is an overall number of refusals in community, without identifiers.

The next telehealth session, with further information on COVID-19 variants and vaccination planning will be held on Thursday, March 4, 2021. Thank you all for your continued participation and patience. We will meet next week, **March 9, 2021 at 1:00pm.**