

ISC-AB Weekly Vaccine Update March 9, 2021

General Updates:

- As of March 8, 2021 there are 6573 total on reserve cases of COVID-19 in Alberta. Of these 6573 total cases – 6000 have recovered, 505 are active in 29 First Nation communities. There are 32 hospitalizations (14 in ICU), and 68 individuals have sadly passed away to date.
- 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 8, 2021, over 9800 doses of COVID-19 have been administered in Alberta First Nations. 62% 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.
- The levels of immunity from the initial dose of the COVID-19 vaccine have been shown to persist over several months. On March 3, 2021 the Government of Alberta announced that the interval between first and second doses will be extended to a maximum of 4 months. This decision is based on a recommendation made by the National Advisory Council on Immunizations (NACI). NACI is constantly reviewing the most recent data and research on COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines. In jurisdictions where the interval between first and second doses has been extended (BC, QC and UK), the high level of protection against COVID-19 was found to last for a longer period than previously understood and it is safe to extend the period of time between administering first and second doses.
- Any individual booking a first dose after March 10, 2021 will receive their second dose after the 4 month interval. Second doses for First Nations over age 65 and living on-reserve have been provided and clinics are underway this week.
- After completing vaccination for the over 65 community, Phase IIA will begin. On March 15, 2021, all individuals in Phase IIA can begin making appointments to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Phase IIA includes First Nations aged 50+ both on and off reserve. For on-reserve populations, we will be following the same process as the first vaccine roll-out, getting validated numbers from each First Nation of the number of people 50 to 64 on each reserve, and planning to deliver this number of additional doses to each First Nation by the end of March. Nations are able to start ordering their vaccine for phase 2A during the week of March 29th. For off-reserve populations, individuals will be able to access vaccine at pharmacies or through AHS by booking on line or calling 811.
- It is anticipated that we will move through Phase II relatively quickly over the next two months. As contained in the email sent March 8, 2021, Phase IIA includes First Nations on and off reserve over the age of 50, Phase IIB includes Albertans over age 18 with chronic conditions, Phase IIC includes any remaining health care staff and congregate care settings such as homeless shelters and Phase IID is any First Nation individual on and off reserve over age 35. It is expected this Phase will be complete by end of May 2021.
- Please provide not only updated population numbers for vaccine rollout but also any requests for human resources or other supports required. As we enter Phase II it will

move quickly so it is important to prepare. An email was sent by Ruth Richardson on Monday this week. Please respond to this email when validating information.

- First Nations in Phase IID of the vaccine rollout plan, those aged 35-49, will have the option to get AstraZeneca should they choose. The wait period for this group to get Moderna or Pfizer vaccines will be at least 2 months, while AstraZeneca will be available sooner. First Nations over 50 on and off reserve will still be prioritized to get Moderna vaccine. AstraZeneca vaccine will not be provided on-reserve at this time and can be booked through AHS clinics. Moderna vaccine will continue to be the product provided on-reserve.
- The centre for disease control in the United States has published guidelines on the requirements for individuals who have received their second dose of the vaccine. This includes loosening some of the public health restrictions i.e. they are recommending that there may be conditions where those who have been vaccinated can visit people in certain settings without their masks on. However, the CDC guidelines still state that even those who have received their 2 doses continue to adhere to health measures when out in the public. No guidelines have been published in Canada to date, but there will likely be updated guidelines in the future as more of the population is vaccinated.
- Alberta Health continues to update the vaccine planning website with the latest information and includes the detailed plan for each population group. You can learn more on each phase here: <https://www.alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine.aspx>

Questions:

- ***Are individuals who receive the AstraZeneca in the urban setting still able to get a Moderna dose when they become eligible for it?***
 - When Phase IIA begins on March 15, 2021, First Nations on-reserve will be receiving the Moderna vaccine. Moderna and Pfizer vaccines will continue to be offered to priority populations.
 - New studies are emerging on whether it is effective to give AstraZeneca as a second dose after providing Moderna, or vice versa. As more evidence emerges, it may be possible to provide more second doses of AstraZeneca but currently, second doses will be the same as first doses.
- ***If Nations do not have Temparmour fridges, what criteria should they be looking for in other fridges?***
 - We are not aware of any other manufacturers that provide the exact type of fridge as Temparmour which provides over 5 days of backup power in the case of a power outage. There may be types of vaccine fridges that are similar, and Nations can use their available funding to purchase them. The most important criteria is that the fridge must protect against power outages for at least 24 hours.
- ***To confirm, after this week's second round of doses, First Nations will have to wait 4 months between their first and second doses? Does this include the 50-64 group?***
 - This is correct. This week, Nations have received second doses of Moderna for the over 65 population and anyone else who received a first dose of vaccine in February. Moving forward, Moderna vaccine allotments for the 50 – 64 population on-reserve will be provided as first doses only. Depending on province-wide uptake, it may be possible to give second doses earlier than the maximum 16 weeks. Any extra doses Nations have may be used for other groups.
- ***Are there any new updates on vaccinating school children?***

- The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) may be reviewing whether children with chronic conditions, aged 12 -15 can receive the Pfizer vaccine. The issue is that there has been no clinical testing on this group, so NACI is weighing the potential benefits which might outweigh risks. Research and learning continues as to whether under 16 vaccination should be undertaken, and trials are underway of different vaccines in these younger age groups.
- The Pfizer vaccine is licensed for use in 16 and 17 year olds. It is possible that this vaccine will be made available to this age group who have chronic conditions. There has been no approval in Canada to date.
- ***Will caregivers for those over 18 with chronic conditions be eligible for the vaccine?***
 - Yes, this group will be include in Phase IIC. More information on who is included in Group C can be found here <https://www.alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine.aspx#phases>
- ***Will off-reserve individuals just receive AstraZeneca and will this vaccine also be given to the on-reserve population?***
 - The off-reserve Indigenous population, over age 35, have the option to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine beginning on March 10, 2021. AstraZeneca will only be provided through AHS clinics and further information is available here <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17295.aspx> First Nations living on reserve who are between 35-49 could also call to book an AstraZeneca immunization through an AHS clinic.
 - All First Nations individuals living on-reserve will continue to receive the Moderna vaccine, including any individuals on-reserve over age 50 beginning on March 15, 2021.

Thank you all for your continued participation and patience. We will meet next week, **March 16, 2021 at 1:00pm.**