

ISC - Alberta Region COVID-19 Update for Chiefs: March 31, 2022



Easing of Public Health Restrictions in Alberta

The province of Alberta remains in Step 2 of the 3-step plan for removal of restrictions. However, masks are still required in settings identified by the [Government of Alberta](#), including public transit, AHS-operated and contracted facilities, and all continuing care settings. Masking requirements continue to be recommended in all health centres located in First Nation communities. Individuals are still currently required to isolate if they test positive for COVID-19. Further information is available [here](#). This is a time of transition as we determine how to best live with COVID-19. As such, the approach of many communities with mask use and public health measures continues to evolve.

Omicron sub-variant BA.2 is now the dominant strain of COVID-19 in Alberta

At last reporting from the province of Alberta, Omicron BA.2 accounts for approximately 70% of positive cases of COVID-19 in PCR tests. At present, BA.2 does not appear to be associated with more severe illness. There also seems to be no indication of a difference in immune escape or vaccine effectiveness, compared to Omicron BA.1. However, there is evidence that Omicron BA.2 appears to be more transmissible than Omicron BA.1. As with the original Omicron, vaccines remain the most effective form of protection against BA.2. Emerging evidence on Omicron variants indicates that swabbing both the mouth and nose is a more effective for detecting COVID-19 when using a rapid antigen test. See the new [guidance for at-home rapid test sample collection](#) for the recommended swabbing process and what to do depending on the results. Watch this [instructional video](#) to learn more.

Regular Childhood Immunizations

Regular childhood immunizations are important as immunization has saved the lives of more babies and children than any other medical intervention. Indigenous Services Canada has developed a [guide](#) to immunization for First Nations and Inuit parent caregivers to share information about vaccines and how they protect children. If children are not immunized, these nearly extinct diseases can become common again. Immunizing children helps to keep diseases such as polio under control for good. This [link](#) can be used to determine a child's immunization schedule. For assistance in organizing immunization clinics in your community, please send a note to the [CD Emergencies inbox](#).

Question of the Day

Q: What does wastewater surveillance tell us about the spread of COVID-19 in communities?

A: When someone is infected with COVID-19 traces of virus are shed through the bowel and get flushed as wastewater, and this water can be tested for the presence of COVID-19. Any virus levels detected are from all infected individuals, whether or not they have sought testing or treatment or even know if they are sick. It is a system of measurement that does not rely on self-reporting of infection and is particularly useful right now, because it is no longer possible to maintain accurate individual case counts.

Wastewater monitoring captures information for specific geographic areas and can help to identify and predict trends, as well as impacts of spread.

To learn more about the feasibility of introducing wastewater testing in your community, please email the [CD Emergencies inbox](#).

Alberta Cases: as of March 30th , 3:30 p.m. MST

AB Total Confirmed (March 28 - 578 new cases)	540,733
AB Deaths due to COVID-19	4,074
Confirmed First Nations On-reserve Cases	19,560
On-reserve Recovered Cases	19,122
On-Reserve Active Cases	264
On-reserve deaths due to COVID-19	172
Calgary Zone Total Confirmed Cases	217,543
Central Zone Total Confirmed Cases	54,846
Edmonton Zone Total Confirmed Cases	172,888
North Zone Total Confirmed Cases	60,102
South Zone Total Confirmed Cases	35,143
Unknown Confirmed	211
Omicron Variants of Concern Confirmed in Alberta	76,091

Useful Links

[National Tree Seed Centre launches Indigenous Seed Collection Program](#)

[Launch of engagement process for First Nations police services legislation](#)

[Nations to Nations: Indigenous Voices at Library and Archives Canada](#)

Alberta Snapshot



More Alberta case data can be found [here](#)

Useful Links

Medical Officer of Health COVID-19 Bulletin

- March 24th MOH Bulletin – click [here](#)

Rewind! Windspeaker Mental Wellness Town Hall programs can be found at the following links:

[Mental Wellness from an Indigenous Perspective](#)

[Coping with Grief and Loss](#)

[Checking in with Indigenous Youth](#)

[Let's Talk Self-Care](#)

[Racism in Healthcare](#)

New Communications Resources:

[Q&A: Why do I need a Booster Dose of the COVID-19 vaccine](#)

[Poster: Facts about COVID-19 vaccines for kids](#)

[Video: Common side effects children might experience after getting the COVID-19 vaccines](#)

[Fact sheet: Vaccinating children against COVID-19](#)

[Poster: Boost Your Immunity](#)

[Video: Ask a Scientist: Will the COVID-19 vaccine affect my fertility?](#)

Additional Updates



Vaccine Snapshot

*as of March 24, 2022

Rising Syphilis cases in Alberta

Syphilis cases are on the rise in Alberta with just under 50% of infectious syphilis cases occurring among Indigenous people and of these, 31% occurring in those individuals living on reserve. Syphilis is a complex, multi-stage bacterial infection that when left untreated can lead to visual and auditory deficits, paralysis, syphilitic aneurysms, and stroke. It can occur in all age groups but the highest rates in Alberta are among women aged 20-29 years and men aged 25-34 years. Syphilis can be detected by a simple blood test and can be effectively treated with antibiotics. Please encourage people in these age groups to get tested.

Data on opioid and stimulant-related overdose deaths

This month the Public Health Agency of Canada released [national data](#) on opioid and stimulant-related overdose deaths in Canada. From January to September of 2021 there were 1099 apparent opioid toxicity deaths in Alberta. The [Alberta Opioid Response Surveillance Report: First Nations People in Alberta](#) notes that First Nations in Alberta have disproportionately higher rates compared to non-First Nations people. Deaths due to opioids continue to have a large impact on First Nations communities in Alberta and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the crisis.

Immediate support can be accessed at the links below:

- [Wellness Together Canada](#) - Mental Health and Substance Use Support
- [Addiction Helpline](#) – 1-866-332-2322
- [Hope for Wellness Help Line](#) - 1-855-242-3310

Local Food Infrastructure Fund – Next phase

The next intake of the Local Food Infrastructure Fund was announced on March 23rd and will run from June 1st to July 15th. It has been tailored to meet the needs of Indigenous, Northern and remote communities by providing funding to help build food systems that will meet both current and future community needs. Eligible projects must be infrastructure-specific, community-driven and dedicated to improving access to healthy, nutritious, and local foods for individuals at risk of food insecurity. Grant funding for projects can range from \$100,000 to \$500,000. Click [here](#) to learn more.



120,806 doses of vaccine have been administered in **46 Nations (bands)** in Alberta.



At least **88.9%** of First Nations people 12+ living on-reserve or crown land have received their **first dose** of the vaccine.



At least **95.3%** of First Nations people aged 65 years and older living on-reserve or crown land have received **two doses** of the vaccine.



At least **17.7%** of First Nations people 12+ living on-reserve or crown land have received **three doses** of the vaccine.