



News Release

February 9, 2021

IMMUNIZATION CLINIC OPENS IN WINNIPEG TO FIRST NATION HEALTH CARE WORKERS, TRADITIONAL HEALERS AND KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

Representatives from the Manitoba First Nations COVID-19 Pandemic Response Coordination Team, in partnership with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, Southern Chiefs' Organization, Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin Inc., First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba and the Manitoba government, are celebrating the opening of a vaccination site to immunize members of priority populations identified by First Nation medical leadership.

The Winnipeg site will focus on immunizing First Nation health-care workers, Knowledge Keepers and Traditional Healers. In total, 889 appointments will be available in the coming days.

“I’ve been looking forward to this day for a year,” said Michael David Blacksmith, a traditional ceremony and sundance leader from Pimicikamak Cree Nation. “The vaccine will help us get back to some sort of normal. It’s so important for Canadian society that we beat the virus and we need to beat it together. I am also here to take the vaccine to help alleviate people’s fears of it. Some of our people, Indigenous peoples, they have fear of the vaccine. I want to say to everyone that the vaccines are not going to harm you.”

Yesterday, an opening ceremony, smudge and prayer marked the opening of the immunization clinic.

Due to the time-limited nature of the pop-up vaccination clinic located in Winnipeg, eligible health-care workers are asked to call and book their appointments as soon as possible. Eligible health-care workers have received booking information from their employers.

In total, 11,800 doses of vaccine have been allocated to First Nation communities by the Manitoba government. In addition to the Winnipeg location, the vaccine was shipped to 63 First Nation communities last month and used to immunize priority populations such as:

- health-care workers in remote or isolated communities,
- residents and staff of personal care homes or Elder care facilities,
- people aged 60 or older in remote and isolated communities, and
- people aged 70 or older in non-remote communities.

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Background information attached

The Province of Manitoba is distributing this news release on behalf of the partners identified above.

Manitoba



BACKGROUND

Launching a New Immunization Clinic for First Nations Health-Care Workers, Traditional Healers and Knowledge Keepers

“Healers and Knowledge Keepers are essential to the health and wellness of Indigenous people across the province of Manitoba. I want to thank our First Nations health experts who are at the forefront of prioritizing the distribution of vaccines to First Nations people – your dedication and hard work is contributing to the protection of our Healers, Knowledge Keepers and our front-line health-care workers. I encourage everyone who receives an opportunity to be vaccinated at the pop-up site to take it to protect themselves.” — Grand Chief Garrison Settee, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak

“I welcome the opening of this new pop-up site to assist and provide vaccines to First Nation Traditional Healers, Knowledge Keepers and Health-Care Workers. They are an important and vital part of First Nations and keeping them safe and healthy as we all fight COVID-19 remains a top priority.” — Grand Chief Arlen Dumas, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

“The survival of our communities relies upon the health and wellness of our precious Traditional Healers and Knowledge Keepers. That is why the opening of this First Nation vaccination site is so essential for our people. I want to thank the First Nation health experts and front-line workers who have put in many hours of tireless work to make this site a reality. The best defense against COVID-19 that we have right now is the vaccine. I encourage everyone to get vaccinated as soon as they are eligible.” — Grand Chief Jerry Daniels, Southern Chiefs’ Organization

“This pop-up immunization site is based on our priorities for immunization, and built on a strong partnership among many organizations serving First Nation communities. It recognizes the essential role that health care workers, Traditional Healers and Knowledge Keepers play in the health and wellness of our people. By protecting them, we protect each other. This is a critical step in ensuring we respond effectively to COVID-19 and ensure the vaccine is available to every First Nation person who wants to be immunized.” — Dr. Marcia Anderson, public health lead, Manitoba First Nations COVID-19 Pandemic Response Coordination Team

“A pipe ceremony was held yesterday morning at the Winnipeg pop-up site, attended by eight elders. It was an affirming ceremony. The space was blessed, recognizing the vaccine as medicine and that we will all work together to support our communities. Everything made comes from Mother Earth. The elders spoke about encouraging people to take the vaccine and to not be afraid. This is sound advice.” — Dr. Barry Lavallee, chief executive officer, Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin

“We’re proud to partner with the First Nation Pandemic Response Coordination Team, the Southern Chiefs’ Organization and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs on this new immunization clinic. Creating more opportunities for Manitobans to be immunized will be beneficial to all of us.” — Health and Seniors Care Minister Heather Stefanson