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GRAND CHIEF STATEMENT ON UPDATE TO COVID-19 VACCINE DISTRIBUTION FOR FIRST NATIONS IN MANITOBA

All Adults on First Nations will have Access to Vaccine Beginning this Month

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 5, 2021

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB – The Grand Chief of the Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is providing this statement as a key update on the distribution of the COVID-19 Vaccine to First Nations in what is now Manitoba.

Public health officials, led by First Nations health expert Dr. Marcia Anderson, announced today that later this month the Moderna vaccine will begin to be distributed to all First Nations in Manitoba for those 18 years of age and older. Vaccine shipments to First Nations will continue throughout the spring, with surge support teams accompanying the vaccine shipments to support immunization.

In order to maximize the efficiency of the support teams, they will visit each First Nation once. This means that all adults 18 years and older are eligible to be vaccinated when their community vaccination site is ready to begin immunization. All adults living in First Nations and who want to be vaccinated will receive their first dose of the vaccine beginning next week and by early May 2021.

"This announcement is what we have been waiting to hear," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "There are a lot of people to thank for today's announcement, which will save lives and begin to end this pandemic. I personally want to thank our First Nation leadership, our health leaders, experts, and all frontline workers who have made today possible. I also want to recognize our Treaty partners for using an evidence-based approach to prioritize First Nations."

Rollout of the vaccine will occur simultaneously across all health regions with prioritization beginning with Nations most at risk of flooding and fire, of losing winter road access, or that are only accessible by ferry. Prioritization will then go to communities that have had the highest fatality rates and most significant outbreaks during the pandemic.

"The data is clear; First Nation citizens are impacted far more than others living in Manitoba," stated Grand Chief Daniels. "Today's announcement recognizes this reality, and will ensure that all First Nation adults who want to be vaccinated will be immunized as quickly as possible."

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Earlier this week, following updated guidelines from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), the province announced they will begin delaying the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. The updated guidelines come from recent, real-world evidence showing that receiving the first dose does offer effective protection from the COVID-19 virus, and therefore, vaccinating as many people with one dose has become an increasing priority.

Currently, First Nation people aged 69 and older are eligible to book appointments for vaccination at four provincial immunization supersites located in Winnipeg, Selkirk, Brandon, and Thompson. Appointments are mandatory and can be made by calling 1-844-626-8222. Caregivers and family members can call to book an appointment on behalf of another person. Individuals will be asked to self-identify as a First Nation person when booking an appointment and identification will be requested at the appointment in order to confirm identity.

As of March 4, 2021, there were 10,127 recorded cases of COVID-19 among First Nation people in Manitoba, a third of all cases in the province. First Nation people represent 74 per cent of all active cases, 44 per cent of current hospitalizations and 67 per cent of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) patients in Manitoba.

Additionally, the median age of hospitalization for First Nation people due to COVID-19 is 51 years, and the median age of death is 66, 17 years younger than the average for the rest of Manitoba. Life expectancy for First Nation people in Manitoba is already 11 years shorter, on average, than all others in Manitoba due to the impacts of colonization, discrimination, economic apartheid, and systemic racism.

“COVID-19 has truly been a tragedy for many of our people,” commented Grand Chief Daniels. “But today’s announcement can inspire hope that the end of this pandemic is now within reach. It’s important for everyone to continue to follow all public health guidelines and remain vigilant against the deadly virus. I also urge all First Nation citizens to be vaccinated as soon as they can.”

As previously shared, First Nation Traditional Healers, Knowledge Keepers, and healthcare workers continue to be eligible for vaccination, on and off reserve. Traditional Healers and Knowledge Keepers were added to the list of eligibility for vaccination due to their central and critical roles in the health of First Nation communities.

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The Southern Chiefs’ Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,000 citizens in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nations peoples’ inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

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