

Head Office

Swan Lake First Nation 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

Winnipeg Sub-Office

1572 Dublin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4

Phone: 204.946.1869 Fax: 204.946.1871 Toll Free: 1.866.876.9701

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GRAND CHIEF STATEMENT ON UPDATE TO COVID-19 VACCINE ELIGIBILITY FOR FIRST NATION CITIZENS IN MANITOBA

General vaccination to begin with First Nation citizens 75 years of age and older

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 24, 2021

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB – The Grand Chief of the Southern Chiefs’ Organization (SCO) is providing this statement as an update on the eligibility of First Nation citizens in Manitoba for the COVID-19 vaccination.

Public health officials announced today that appointments can now be made to schedule COVID-19 vaccinations for First Nation people aged 75 years or older. First Nation citizens who are 70 years or older and living in First Nation communities that are accessible by road have already been offered immunization, as well as those who are 60 years or older living in remote, fly-in First Nation communities.

“Today is a hugely important day in our fight against the COVID-19 virus,” stated SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “With vaccination opening to the off reserve population starting with our citizens 75 years or older, we are that much closer to ending this deadly pandemic. Now that we have increasing access to the life-saving vaccine, I strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated as soon as they can.”

All First Nation citizens aged 75 and older are encouraged to call 1-844-626-8222 to book their appointment for vaccination. 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.

Appointments are being made at the five vaccination supersites currently open in the province, one in every health region: Winnipeg, Brandon, Selkirk, Winkler/Morden and Thompson.

First Nation citizens are eligible for vaccination at a twenty year differential with the rest of Manitoba, as non-First Nation individuals aged 95 years and older are now eligible for vaccination. This differential was announced by public health experts at the beginning of February to ensure equity, and it follows an evidence-based approach to address the higher levels of risk experienced by First Nation people during this pandemic.

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As of February 23, 2021, there were 9,859 recorded cases of COVID-19 among First Nation people in Manitoba. First Nation people represent 70 per cent of all active cases, 29 per cent of total hospitalizations and 50 per cent of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) patients in Manitoba.

Furthermore, the median age of hospitalization for First Nation people due to COVID-19 is 51 years, and the median age of death is 66, which is 17 years younger than the average for the rest of Manitoba. First Nation people already have a life expectancy that is 11 years shorter, on average, than the rest of Manitoba due to the impact of colonization, discrimination and systemic racism.

“It’s been incredibly tough for all First Nation people throughout this pandemic, but this week is quite significant for us,” commented Grand Chief Daniels. “We can now say that vaccines are becoming available for all of our citizens, starting with our elderly population. It’s great to share positive news about the vaccine with all of our people this week.”

All of the Southern Chiefs’ Organization’s 34 member communities will begin to receive their supply of second doses of the Moderna vaccine starting this week and they should all have the second doses within the next ten days. The second doses will go to those over 70 years of age in First Nations accessible by road and those over 60 years of age in fly-in First Nation communities.

Additionally, all First Nation Traditional Healers, Knowledge Keepers, and healthcare workers are 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. They include:

- People who are recognized and respected ceremonial leaders, e.g. Sundance leaders
- People who are recognized and respected Healers using ceremonies, plants, touch or other modalities
- People who are recognized and respected Knowledge Keepers and lead in the passing on of cultural teachings and practices

“I cannot stress enough how essential it is to ensure that all First Nation people who want to be immunized have access to the vaccine as quickly and safely as possible,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “This is a top issue for us and we will continue to work with First Nation health experts, organizations, and our Treaty partners to ensure all First Nation people are prioritized.”

First Nation organizations and the provincial government are also launching a new dashboard, compiling best estimates on the vaccination of First Nation people in Manitoba. Every Friday, the data will be updated from multiple sources. It will be broken down by tribal council regions and by regional health authorities, showing the percentage of First Nation people living on reserve who have received one or two doses plus doses administered on and off reserve. SCO will share this updated data on [our website](#) as well.

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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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For Media Inquiries:

Caitlin Reid, Manager of Communications, Southern Chiefs' Organization
(204) 557-2399 | Email: Media@scoinc.mb.ca