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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 06, 2021

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB – The Grand Chief of the Southern Chiefs’ Organization is providing this statement as an update on the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to southern First Nations in Manitoba.

The Moderna vaccine will begin to be shipped to First Nations as early as tomorrow, January 7, 2021. First Nations in Manitoba will receive 5300 doses of the Moderna vaccine for immediate vaccination. As of today, the Province of Manitoba has committed an additional allocation of 5300 doses which will rollout the week of February 23, 2021.

“This is a significant day in the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “Our Treaty partners have responded to our urgent request for additional doses. This will ensure all First Nation people and health care staff in Personal Care Homes, and all those over 60 years of age in remote communities, and over 70 years of age in non-remote communities, will be offered a vaccine in Stage One of the distribution beginning tomorrow.”

The Moderna and Pfizer vaccines have been approved for use across Canada and both require a primary shot followed by a booster shot. The Moderna vaccine is considered better suited for use in rural and remote communities because unlike the Pfizer vaccine, it can be stored at regular freezer temperatures and does not require special ultra cold freezers.

In mid-December 2020, First Nation representatives were invited to join the intergovernmental COVID-19 Manitoba Vaccine Task Force. Cindy Garson, a nurse of 27 years with 10 years of health management experience, was selected to represent SCO on this Task Force. Garson is Director of Health for the Interlake Reserves Tribal Council.

“Our deepest thanks and gratitude goes out to our colleague Cindy Garson,” stated Grand Chief Daniels. “Her commitment to serving our 34 Anishinaabe and Dakota First Nations on this essential Task Force is remarkable, and it follows decades of commitment to improving health services for our people at the local, regional and national levels. I want to also acknowledge the tireless work of our First Nation Chiefs, Councillors, Health Directors, front line and essential workers who have all given so much over the past nine months to help keep our people safe during the pandemic.”

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First Nations are identified as a priority for the vaccine due to overwhelming evidence that shows our people are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As of January 6th, 2021, there were 6,185 recorded cases of COVID-19 among First Nation people in Manitoba. First Nation people represent 49 per cent of all active cases, 29 per cent of the province's total hospitalizations and 50 per cent of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) patients in Manitoba. The median death rate for First Nation people is 66, while for the overall Manitoba population it is 83.

The following First Nation priority groups have been identified by the Task Force:

- Essential health care workers providing services in remote and isolated communities who cannot access the provincial vaccination supersites
- Residents and staff of personal care homes and elder care facilities
- People over the age of 60 living in remote and isolated communities
- People over the age of 70 living in non-remote communities

All First Nation people over the age of 60 living in First Nation communities will be offered the vaccine in Stage Two.

"We thank our Treaty Partners for responding to our urgent request to vaccinate our Elders as quickly as possible," concluded Grand Chief Daniels. "We continue to mourn the loss of our beloved friends and family members who will never be forgotten."

Grand Chief Jerry Daniels, on behalf of the southern Chiefs, will continue to advocate that all First Nation people, on and off reserve, in this Territory and across Canada, be prioritized for vaccination. We remain committed to this work as a foremost priority and encourage everyone to continue to follow all public health guidelines to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Further information about vaccine distribution including logistics planning will be available later this week.

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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.