



March 24, 2021

First Nations Chiefs

Dear Chiefs:

In early February, the Saskatchewan COVID-19 Immunization Delivery Plan was released, which outlines two distinct phases for immunizing the people of Saskatchewan. As of March 18, 2021, Saskatchewan has officially entered Phase 2, which will employ an age-based sequencing approach in order to distribute vaccine as rapidly and efficiently as possible across the province. While the eligibility categories have broadened into the Phase 2 recommendations, vaccinations and eligibility for individuals identified in Phase 1 will continue until completed. This includes completing all first and second doses for long-term care and personal care home residents and staff.

While we are starting to see an increased vaccine supply in Saskatchewan, the reduction in vaccine allocations earlier this year had a significant impact on our ability to move through Phase 1 as quickly as we would have liked. We are still working towards completing our priority groups for Phase 1. While our long-term care and personal care home residents and staff have received first doses, some front-line health care workers, people over 70 in all communities and residents over 50 in northern, remote communities are still awaiting immunization.

As you may be aware, initially consideration was given to vaccinating First Nations and Métis residents over the age of 40 throughout the province, and that was the approach taken in some communities. However, the scarcity of vaccine in Saskatchewan and across the country necessitated adjustments to the immunization delivery plan. Phase 1 continues to include residents over 50 in northern, remote communities. We recognize that First Nations and Métis residents face a disproportionate level of health challenges and expect those individuals with serious clinical vulnerabilities will be vaccinated within the early part of Phase 2.

Evidence shows that age is the highest risk factor for more serious disease and poor outcomes from COVID-19. People of advanced age are also more likely to be immunocompromised or living with other chronic conditions. This is the reasoning behind taking an age-based approach to immunization in Phase 2.

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Moving forward, we're expecting that we'll be able to vaccinate people sooner than expected. The announcement of increased supplies of COVID-19 vaccine, as well as extending the interval between first and second doses to four months, means that people who wish to receive a vaccine will be able to receive their first dose before the end of June 2021. Based on strong evidence, protection of the general population will increase, helping to protect residents of Saskatchewan who are most at risk.

After receiving recommendations from the Immunization Planning Indigenous Advisory Committee based on feedback from many First Nations leaders, the Ministry of Health began discussions with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to return to more historic relationships around the delivery of immunizations. We recognize the advantage and potential of leveraging existing structures within ISC and First Nations communities to deliver vaccine. As a result, we have finalized an agreement with ISC to deliver vaccinations to First Nations communities in Saskatchewan, and will work with ISC in the coming days to share details with you about this agreement. We understand that ISC has engaged in similar conversations with the Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority (NITHA) regarding vaccine delivery to northern First Nation communities, as ISC and NITHA are in the best position to support vaccine delivery to First Nations communities.

Métis residents will receive vaccine through the Saskatchewan Health Authority, and the province will continue to work with the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan to ensure Métis residents are able to access vaccines according to the sequencing framework.

Through the Saskatchewan COVID-19 Immunization Delivery Plan, we believe we are taking the most equitable approach to ensuring fair and equal access to vaccine for all Saskatchewan residents.

Sincerely,



Max Hendricks
Deputy Minister of Health

cc: Scott Livingstone, Chief Executive Officer, Saskatchewan Health Authority
Jocelyn Andrews, Regional Executive Officer, Indigenous Services Canada
