



This communication is intended to provide timely and important information to our municipal leaders, health system partners, health and hospital foundations, and other community based organizations. Please feel free to distribute among your stakeholders as appropriate.

## **| COVID-19 | Immunization Campaign – 5 Minute Message**

Major progress has been made this week in a number of workstreams, despite new information and changes being introduced each day. A focus on team resilience and daily conversations about the number of lives impacted is helping all teams to continue on with this important work.

[Review the 5-minute message.](#)

Please see the Government of Saskatchewan [website](#) for updated information on the vaccine rollout.

## **| COVID-19 | Saskatchewan to adopt new recommendations for timing of second dose**

Following a [statement](#) from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization on March 3, Saskatchewan has adopted new timing intervals for the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. With these changes, a person's second dose of vaccine may be administered up to 16 weeks after their first. This will allow more Saskatchewan residents to receive early protection from a first dose. It is estimated that all residents over the age of 18 in Saskatchewan will have an offer of vaccine before the end of June.

[Read the Government of Saskatchewan news release.](#)

## **| COVID-19 | Vaccines: Are they all alike?**

On February 26, 2021, the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine was approved for use by Health Canada. This is the third vaccine in use, with the others being Pfizer BioNtech and Moderna. The primary difference with the AstraZeneca vaccine is that it is a viral vector vaccine rather than an mRNA vaccine.

Pfizer BioNtech and Moderna's mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) vaccines are designed to send a message to the cells to create a harmless "spike protein" that is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. Our body then begins developing antibodies in response to the presence of the protein. The result is that our body learns to mount a natural defense to the virus just as it would if there were a natural COVID-19 infection.

A viral vector vaccine differs in that it uses a harmless virus, which is **not** the COVID-19 virus, to transport information to the human cell. This causes production of the spike protein associated with COVID-19, so that our body can then trigger an immune response. Although the viral vector vaccine is different from an mRNA vaccine, the goal of both is the same.



Although all three vaccines have a similar goal, they are not all equal in terms of other factors. The AstraZeneca vaccine is more flexible for delivery across the province's large geographical area. The vaccine can be stored at 2+ to 8+ Celsius and can be kept up to 48 hours after being opened if kept at this temperature.

There may be similarities and differences between the three vaccines, but the common thread is that we need all of these vaccines if we are to hope to achieve widespread immunity and a return to normal. All of them work to combat COVID-19 and prevent severe illness.

In the short-term, we still need to adhere to masking, washing hands and physical distancing, but the approval of AstraZeneca makes us one step closer to achieving our goal.

Follow the Saskatchewan Health Authority on Twitter and Facebook for more stories and updates on COVID-19. For further information on the Vaccine Delivery Plan, please visit [www.Saskatchewan.ca/COVID19-vaccine](http://www.Saskatchewan.ca/COVID19-vaccine).

## **| COVID-19 | AstraZeneca Vaccine to be Introduced to Saskatchewan**

15,500 doses of Canada's newest vaccine, AstraZeneca, are due to arrive in the province soon. This vaccine has been prioritized for the following two groups:

- Citizens ages 60-64; and
- Eligible phase one health care workers.

More details on how these groups can book will be released in the next week.

When compared with both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the primary difference with the AstraZeneca vaccine is that it is a viral vector vaccine rather than an mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) vaccine.

Pfizer BioNtech and Moderna's mRNA vaccines are designed to send a message to the cells to create a harmless "spike protein" that is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. Our body then begins developing antibodies in response to the presence of the protein. The result is that our body learns to mount a natural defense to the virus just as it would if there were a natural COVID-19 infection.

[Read the Government of Saskatchewan news release.](#)

## **| COVID-19 | COVID-19 Vaccine: Symptoms are normal, expected**

Christine Firman-Depeel, a Nurse Practitioner at the Cumberland Health Centre, never questioned whether she would accept the COVID-19 vaccine when it became available, or that she might experience side effects from the vaccine.

"I don't like referring to them as 'side effects'," says Christine, "I prefer 'reassurance indicators' that my body is doing what it's supposed to do."



Having discomfort after any immunization is not uncommon. After receiving the COVID-19 vaccine Christine experienced “fever, chills, headache, body aches and fatigue for 24 hours, but I viewed this as my body working hard to build a protective immunity with the help of the vaccine.”

This effect may be more pronounced on the second dose, as it continues to build on the first dose. Christine knows that even after both doses she will still need to follow public health orders including masking, washing hands and physical distancing.

Healthcare workers and physicians have a legal obligation by the Public Health Act to report a reaction, depending on the severity. These Adverse Event Following Immunization (AEFI) reports are tracked and used to continually monitor the safety of vaccines in Canada.

There are two types of reactions that can occur: (1) local, which would include injection site pain, redness or swelling; and (2) systemic, which can often be non-specific and include tiredness, headache, muscle pain, joint pain, chills, fever or possibly enlarged lymph nodes (swollen glands).

Within both categories there are three levels of severity: mild, moderate or major reactions. The two reportable levels include moderate reactions such as extremely high fever or severe local reactions, and major reactions such as Anaphylaxis or neurological events. The focus is on reactions which are unexpected given the circumstance. Health Canada reports that as few as 1 in every 1 million people will experience Anaphylaxis. The 15 minute wait time after receiving a dose is a precaution in the event that a serious response like this should occur, so that it can be treated immediately.

Christine experienced discomfort beyond a mild local reaction, but maintains that it was worth the alternative.

“This virus is not a hoax. I’ve witnessed the death and devastation it can cause. That’s why I welcomed the opportunity to receive the vaccine and allow my body the opportunity to protect me,” she stated. She also looks forward to her final immunization, as her life has been “dedicated to keeping people healthy. I can thank science for getting me where I am today, and I will continue to trust science in guiding me professionally and personally. I choose to be part of the solution, so I welcome the COVID-19 vaccine.”

Serious side effects are rare. However, should you develop any serious symptoms or symptoms that could be an allergic reaction, call 9-1-1. Report any serious side effects to a physician, nurse practitioner or public health nurse for advice, and so they can also report the reaction.

Before you receive your second dose, inform the person administering the vaccine of any side effects you experienced after the first dose.



### **| COVID-19 |** Checking In with Saskatchewan’s first COVID-19 Vaccine Recipients: **Leah Sawatsky**

*Registered nurse Leah Sawatsky was one of the first two people in the province to be immunized for COVID-19. We caught up with Leah for her insights on her vaccination experience.*

#### **Why was getting vaccinated important to you?**

I see COVID positive people at work every day, and vaccination is a way to protect my patients, myself and my family. I have to make sure my three kids are protected, and that I will be here for them.

It's also important for health care workers to be a role model for the public. People might be scared or hesitant to be vaccinated, so seeing us stepping forward is helpful.

#### **Has your attitude changed about COVID-19 vaccination between your first dose and now?**

I would say I’m an even stronger advocate because we aren’t seeing enough of a change in our infection numbers. Everybody needs to be on board for this to work.

#### **What were reactions from colleagues, friends and family when you were vaccinated?**

I only had positive comments. My phone was blowing up with support from friends, family, and people I haven't spoken to since high school, so that was nice.

#### **Any negative reactions?**

Nobody has been negative to my face but there’s been comments on Facebook - which doesn't bother me at all. There were a handful of people on social media saying the vaccination was fake and that I wasn't actually getting it. One gentleman even said that I probably had a gun to my head, and was told I would lose my job if I didn't get vaccinated.

I’m not sure what we would gain from faking it. Our only goal is to stop the spread of COVID, and the severity of the illness to get us back to normal, see each other face to face again. Older populations in particular are really eager to be vaccinated.

#### **Did you have any anxiety being immunized?**

I don't think I did. I had some questions initially, but I did my own research. I learned more about mRNA vaccines and how they're developed and the extensive research behind them and ultimately, I trusted that my employer wouldn't put me in a position that wasn't in my best interest.

#### **Any side effects from either dose?**

Nothing from either dose.



*Registered Nurse Leah Sawatsky (right) receives one of the first COVID-19 vaccinations in Saskatchewan on December 16, 2020.*

**Being one of the first in the province to be vaccinated, have you had the opportunity to educate others about vaccines?**

When some of my patients see my immunization sticker they ask questions. How it was, if I was nervous at all, if I've had any side effects? It's a good conversation starter.

**What do you say to anyone who isn't sure about being vaccinated?**

What many people don't know is that even a lot of young, healthy people who get COVID end up with long standing health issues. In my opinion, the very small risk of side effects from a vaccine, is safer than not being vaccinated and seeing what cards you are dealt after getting COVID.

**| COVID-19 | A message from CEO Scott Livingstone**

It was two years ago today, March 4, 2019, that the [Saskatchewan Health Authority \(SHA\) formalized our commitment to work with our Indigenous partners](#) toward addressing the Calls to Action identified for health-care in the *Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Final Report*. This plan provides direction on addressing the harms caused by the residential school system and details guiding principles focused on addressing our shared past and making a positive impact on the lives of Indigenous Peoples.

I believe the important goals we set forth were never more relevant than in this past year as we have worked together in our fight against the COVID-19 global pandemic. Identifying the need for culturally appropriate messages presented in traditional languages, and addressing barriers such as overcrowding in family households and the increased risk to many Indigenous people with pre-existing conditions, meant that there was no one size fits all approach to protect our communities. We are proud of the work with our First Nations and Métis Health team as well as local and provincial community leaders to develop specific responses to the pandemic.

In addition, we also recognized that more work was required in our overall approach to how we offer healthcare in Saskatchewan to address the Calls to Action including recruitment and retention issues, introducing traditional food into our facilities, and revising and creating new policies addressing our commitment to TRC.

We are meeting regularly with the Traditional Knowledge Keeper's Council, whose work helps guide SHA leadership in helping make system changes that will ensure cultural responsiveness and create culturally safe environments that meet the needs of First Nations and Métis people.

Our First Nations and Métis Health team and Maternal and Children's Programs worked in collaboration with Dumont Technical Institute, Gabriel Dumont Institute Training & Employment, and the Saskatoon Tribal Council to develop the Indigenous Birth Support Worker (IBSW) Program.

More than 140 culturally responsive training, education programs, and information sessions were delivered to over 4,400 SHA employees. Much of this work is grounded in our newly created "unity strategy" which seeks to present a



pathway and vision for achieving unity through unlearning historical misconceptions, acknowledging and healing past injustices, rebuilding trust and forging authentic relationships.

While we are very proud of the successes we have achieved in the past year, we understand that much more work needs to be done. As was mentioned in the TRC report, reconciliation is not a one-time set of achievements, but “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships”. I look forward to continuing to lead our organization’s efforts on this important work now and into the future.

### **| COVID-19 | Celebrating Immunizations with Facebook Profile Frame**

With COVID-19 immunizations underway, our First Nations and Métis partners can show their support and encourage colleagues, friends and family to get their vaccinations by updating their Facebook profile pic with a SHA’s First Nations and Métis “Get Vaccinated!” frame.

The Saskatchewan Health Authority works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Saskatchewan as the traditional territory of First Nations and Métis People.

It was important to have this frame created to recognize the efforts of this group with the guidance of SHA partners, Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Using these frames, everyone who uses Facebook can help spread the word and make sure that their community takes advantage of these life-saving vaccines.

**To update a Facebook profile with this special edition frame follow these simple steps:**

1. Log into Facebook profile
2. Click on *Update Profile Picture*. Once there is an option to either upload a new photo or add a frame.
3. Choose *Add a Frame*
4. Search for FNMH Sask Health
5. Choose the *Get Vaccinated by Saskatchewan Health Authority FNMH*
6. Click on use as profile pic



### **| COVID-19 | Working together to support immunization**

On February 22, 2021, a pipe ceremony was held to initiate a journey that includes community Elders supporting immunization clinics in Regina for First Nations and Métis people greater than 70 years of age. The clinics will launch on March 3, 2021 and will be held at the Gathering Place in Regina.



The clinics are the product of a partnership between Regina Treaty Status Indian Services (RTSIS), Métis Nation Saskatchewan, First Nations and Métis community leaders, the Wellness Wheel and the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

“We’re so excited to see this program move forward, as the team has done amazing work to engage with our community, First Nations and Métis partners and leaders,” said Laveena Tratch, COVID Immunization Chief, Regina, for the Saskatchewan Health Authority. “It’s another valuable opportunity to work together to reduce inequities and better serve our community.”

Elders and support persons will be in attendance at the weekly clinics to support information sharing, screening and post-immunization observation, working alongside the clinical healthcare workers.