Indigenous Services Canada | Services aux Autochtones Canada

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ATTN: First Nation community members across Saskatchewan

Yesterday the Government of Saskatchewan announced an update to the Public Health Orders in response to the spread of the latest COVID-19 variant of concern Omicron. This variant is extremely contagious and has the potential to overwhelm hospital, lab and public health capacity.

Beginning immediately, there is new guidance on testing, with self-administered Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT) becoming the preferred test for asymptomatic people. These tests are widely available with every First Nation in the province having received monthly allocations since October. Every household in communities should have and use these kits at least weekly. (Rapid Antigen Tests are very sensitive to cold weather and should be kept above 5° Celsius at all times.)

Anyone with symptoms should get a PCR test at their local health centre and isolate. A positive RAT for someone without symptoms does not require a PCR test but the individual should isolate. Anyone testing positive, with either test, should contact their close contacts – those who have been within 2 metres of them for more than 15 minutes regardless of mask use, or anyone who has been in the same household as a positive case.

The Government of Saskatchewan also reduced the length of isolation for fully vaccinated individuals who test positive for COVID. If you are fully vaccinated (two doses and two weeks passed): self-isolate for **five days** from the date of test or 24 hours after you no longer have a fever, whichever is later. If you are not vaccinated or partially vaccinated: self-isolate for **10 days** from the date of test or 24 hours after you no longer have a fever, whichever is later.

These changes were made based on the latest understanding of the Omicron variant and the effectiveness of being fully vaccinated. We encourage leadership to consider the rate of vaccination in their communities before changing their approach. In communities with lower rates of full vaccination, it may be prudent to continue broader use of PCR testing as that allows for more effective contact tracing by Public Health staff. We would welcome the opportunity to have our public health teams advise on the best approach for your community and provide resources to support decision-making at the community level.

As Omicron becomes more prevalent in the province, the importance of fully vaccinating our population grows. Vaccinations clinics will return to full operation early in the new year and everyone over the age of five is eligible. Please encourage all your family and friends to complete their two doses and everyone over 18 should get their booster shot too.

We wish you all a safe, healthy and happy new year!

Respectfully,

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