



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**

In [this week's update](#), learn more about the phase two of the campaign, including new fact sheets, QnA and website content. The team is also making their work more visual and tracking overall progress to 'full system readiness.'

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

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

## **| COVID-19 | Saskatchewan Announced Phase Two Immunization Rollout Plan**

Tuesday, February 9, [our Government shared an update](#) with the public about our plans for the second phase of COVID-19 immunizations. This **includes planning for everything we can**, so we are ready to begin mass immunizations.

The plan will be flexible and adaptable to accommodate changes to vaccine supplies, including any new vaccines that may receive approval.

These plans are the result of hard work and dedication of many, many people across the organization, who have pulled together in just two weeks to draw up plans on Saskatchewan's largest-ever immunization campaign.

Our goals are the same as we have had since the pandemic began. We need to minimize serious illness and death, protect those most vulnerable, protect health care capacity and infrastructure, while also minimizing the spread of COVID-19. We know that we cannot fully get "back to normal" unless we can realize mass immunization, so with this campaign comes the hope that the end is near.

Saskatchewan's phase two plans will build on the success that we've seen through our experience with influenza and the pandemic to date, and also introduce **new innovations and leverage new opportunities to integrate vaccination into everyday health services, as close to home as possible.**

We will strengthen our partnerships with other health provider organizations, and think differently about how we can make immunization accessible to everyone, but first and foremost our most vulnerable populations.

**As vaccine quantities increase, Saskatchewan will require additional immunizers.**

Planning and preparation is already underway to increase the pool of COVID-19 trained immunizers, going beyond our existing labour pool to meet clinic needs, which, at their peak, will be offered seven days-per-week.



Drive-thru immunization, mobile clinics, pharmacy and practitioner partnerships and collaboration with our First Nations and Métis partners and municipalities are all critical to success. As are the everyday vaccine champions who can help us spread the message of safety and combat hesitancy that might exist.

In fact, a Vaccine Uptake Task Team has been stood up to explore this very issue. This is truly an all-hands-on-deck initiative, and we'll need everyone to look for opportunities to get involved.

Getting the vaccine to every person that wants one is already a complicated process requiring months of planning, as our influenza efforts have shown.

This year, not only are the timelines shorter, but the need to deliver two doses of the vaccines, each with their own special requirements for storing and transportation, make this challenge even more complex.

Throw in manufacturing headaches, the pending approval of even more brands of vaccine, and Saskatchewan's winter weather, and you can imagine that this campaign to date has already seen its fair share of hurdles to overcome.

And yet, at our recent planning report-out, the group spoke of hope, of excitement, and of how many lives we would be able to touch through this effort. That, at its core, is what this is all about.

You can visit the updated website for vaccine at [www.saskatchewan.ca/covid19-vaccine](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/covid19-vaccine) and **continue to watch for future updates around how you can become involved with this life-saving effort.**

## **| COVID-19 | Vaccine: Facing Down COVID-19, one person at a time**

Judy Pelly is a remarkable woman. She is a Cultural Advisor, a residential school survivor, and a Saulteaux Elder, although she's hesitant to call herself one because of the tremendous knowledge and respect that Elders hold in her culture. Understanding the importance of Elders in Indigenous culture, and the risk that COVID-19 poses to the elderly in particular, gave Judy the incentive she needed to agree to receive the vaccine.

Judy grew up with seven sisters and five brothers on Cote First Nation. "It's not far from the metropolis of Kamsack," she laughed. Her childhood was marred by time spent in a residential school, but her spirituality would put her on a better path. She graduated from the University of Saskatchewan and became a Cultural Advisor to First Nations Métis Health Services, and more recently a Mental Health and Addictions Adult Outreach contractor.

"My experience was like so many others," she said. "We were abused, and the personal damage was significant, but I learned that the most important thing was to talk about my experiences, so that I could release what had been pent up





inside. We don't talk about these things and it becomes an inter-generational problem that continues from parent to child."

Judy reflected on being immunized, as she had recently received her COVID-19 vaccine: "I almost cried when they called to schedule the appointment." She believes it's important to talk about her experience to those she knows, as many are looking for a first-hand account. "I really had no side effects at all, and I think that may have helped other people in my personal circle decide to get immunized."

Judy is sharing her story, so that others pause to consider receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. "It's not only about protecting ourselves, it's also about protecting our Elders."

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 [Saskatchewan.ca/COVID19-vaccine](https://saskatchewan.ca/COVID19-vaccine).

## **/COVID-19/Variant of concern has arrived in Saskatchewan**

The UK COVID-19 variant (B.1.1.7) has been detected in two residents in the Regina zone and one in the Saskatoon zone. The contact investigation has determined that one case had travelled from the United Kingdom and the second is a close contact of the traveler. The Saskatoon case had a history of travel to Pakistan. All three residents quarantined appropriately following travel and are now no longer infectious. Questions and answers:

### **Q: Is there any risk to the public?**

**A:** No. Public health's contact investigation indicates that all contacts of these residents have been identified and there is no indication of further transmission. All three residents quarantined appropriately following travel and are now no longer infectious.

### **Q: Does this variant require any new precautions for the public?**

**A:** The best protection against all COVID-19 variants remains the same as protection against COVID-19:

- Stay home
- Physically distance
- Wash your hands frequently
- Wear a mask
- Get tested if you are experiencing even mild symptoms.

### **Q: How long is this variant contagious for? Is it the same as the "normal" COVID-19 virus?**

**A:** There is no evidence that this variant of COVID-19 is contagious any longer than COVID-19.

### **Q: What is different about this variant?**

**A:** This variant of COVID-19 has increased transmissibility. That means it spreads more easily than COVID-19 does.



## **| COVID-19 | Know the Facts, Share the Facts**

### **Fact check: COVID-19 PCR testing in Saskatchewan is accurate**

With so much information coming at a person about COVID-19, sometimes it is difficult to tell fact from fiction.

One social media rumour regarding COVID-19 PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing is a claim that the test is inaccurate or that our labs are not following World Health Organization and Health Canada guidelines for COVID-19 testing. That is not correct.



All COVID-19 tests in Saskatchewan are interpreted according to their IFU (instructions for use/ manufacturer's recommendations) which are approved by Health Canada. The number of cycles (number of times sample viral RNA (ribonucleic acid) need to be amplified to reach a detectable level) depends of the assay (test) but the general standard for most PCRs is to go through 40 cycles. The actual threshold for positive versus indeterminate are chosen based on validations and vary assay to assay based on the clinical performance. Our lab staff meet the highest standards possible and work very hard every day to ensure quality control and that results are accurate.

Stay home if you feel unwell and [take the self-assessment tool](#) to determine if you need a COVID-19 test. Continue to follow the current public health order and all public health advice.

## **| COVID-19 | COVID-19 and masks – why it's so important to wear one in the hospital**

It's part of the Public Health Order – “All persons shall wear a face covering that covers the nose and mouth when in... enclosed settings (including) addiction treatment centres, complex care centres, health centres, hospitals, mental health centres, residential treatment centres or special-care homes designated pursuant to The Provincial Health Authority Act.”

It is extremely important – and actually required – for those who are visiting and supporting loved ones in hospitals or other health care facilities to comply with the public health order in regards to masks, as COVID-19 can be transmitted by people who have symptoms, as well as those who are infectious but not symptomatic in the two days before symptoms develop.

“It's so very important that those who come into our facilities wear a mask to protect others but also themselves,” explains Katherine Stevenson, Director of Quality and Safety for the Saskatchewan Health Authority. “We recognize the importance of ensuring patients have the support of their loved ones, even during the pandemic. Keeping spread low helps us keep visitation and family presence as open as possible. When masking and other precautions like distancing



and hand hygiene aren't followed by the whole team, including family and supports, everyone from our patients to our healthcare workforce and other visitors are put at risk."

Universal masking within SHA facilities was implemented in fall 2020, and directs all staff and physicians to wear masks everywhere in any health care facility, with very few exceptions. This is now true as well for any family or caregivers who are entering our facilities. Medical masks will be provided at the doors to all those entering the facility.

"Having everyone, regardless of whether they have symptoms of COVID-19, wear a medical mask over their mouth and nose prevents droplet and aerosol spread of COVID-19," explained Stevenson. "This decreases the possibility that anyone with unrecognized infection will expose others and helps to keep everyone safer."

Masks are only one piece of the puzzle in terms of preventing the transmission of COVID-19. Physical distancing, hand washing and disinfecting are other pieces and when used together, they minimize risk.

### **| COVID-19 | Continuous masking necessary in health care settings**

Continuous masking within health care settings is a critical tool to protect health care workers and patients from being infected by asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic individuals, and a key measure to suppress the transmission of COVID-19 and save lives.

To address asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission, all Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) facilities have implemented source control for everyone entering a healthcare facility (e.g., healthcare personnel, patients, visitors), regardless of symptoms. Source control involves having everyone wear a mask (medical mask within health care facilities) over their mouth and nose to prevent droplet and aerosol spread of COVID-19, decreasing the possibility that anyone with unrecognized infection will expose others.

For source control to be effective, it requires that everyone wear a mask within health care buildings. This includes all essential family members and support persons. Remember to practice patience, compassion and understanding when addressing those who need to be reminded of our masking policies.

### **Why haven't we had a flu season?**

As of January 21, 2021, there have been 1,489 tests for influenza processed in Saskatchewan with no positive test results.

For comparison purposes, last year there were more than 3,700 tests processed and 1,369 positive results – a test positive rate of almost 37 per cent.



“This lack of influenza cases in Saskatchewan is the same as what we are seeing across Canada,” noted Dr. Tania Diener, Medical Health Officer, and the SHA’s co-lead for the influenza vaccine program. “Only 56 cases were confirmed as of last week, where we normally see more than 21,000 by this time over the last six Influenza seasons in Canada.”

The above in fact means that the start of the 2020-21 influenza season had not been declared on a national level.

There are several reasons for this:

- The extensive community mitigation measures that are in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as using face masks, social distancing, and increased personal hygiene – all the hand sanitizer we’ve been using, and the hand-washing we have been doing.
- The fact that there have been partial lockdowns from time-to-time, working from home and much less travel.
- The significant reduction in international travel has played an important role, as we usually see influenza cases that are a result of travel.
- The southern hemisphere had a very mild influenza season, and that normally helps predict the type of season we would see in the northern hemisphere.

“All of this has made a huge difference in terms of influenza activity,” Diener stated.

View the [full Flu Watch](#) report on Canada’s Public Health website.

## Heart Health: Recognizing and handling stress

February is Heart Health Month. Did you know that eight out of 10 cases of premature heart disease and stroke cases are preventable through healthy lifestyle behaviours?

Often, stressors are things you cannot control. What you can control is recognizing and handling stress effectively as an important part of maintaining overall heart health. Sometimes it is not easy to recognize stress because we are caught up in the flow of life.

The Heart and Stroke foundation offers quick questions to help you recognize stress symptoms in our thoughts, emotions, body, behaviour and actions and offers practical mental, emotional, physical and behavioural suggestions to manage and reduce stress. To check out their tips on reducing stress, [visit their website](#).

## Making fitness a habit

It takes an average of 66 days for most people to form a new habit. That is just over two months!

- If you sit all day, you may want to set your goal to add 20 minutes of walking three days a week. That's a very achievable goal. Plan for this in your day, by writing it in your calendar so you don't forget or plan something else at that time.
- If you're on your feet all day, start with adding in stretching and/or upper body strength such as push-ups



against a wall or using hand weights for biceps/triceps and shoulders.

Set yourself up for success! Research has shown that those who log their activity tend to stick with their program. Whatever you decide to do, add into your daily routine. It's important to be consistent until it becomes a habit.

After the two months, increase the challenge by extending the walk or adding another activity. Instead of walking on flat ground, walk up and down stairs to increase your cardiovascular fitness and strengthen your legs. Motivate yourself by reviewing your log to see where you started and how you've progressed.

Small steps are still progress, so congratulate yourself with each milestone you make.