

Latest NIRO/MOH/SHA Updates

- **COVID-19 TESTING STRATEGY- TEST TO PROTECT**

The Ministry of Health announced plans to expand testing options for asymptomatic individuals in additional settings across the province. You can read the [news release](#) on the Government of Saskatchewan website.

- **WHAT IS THE PLAN?**

MOH are developing a strategy to deploy more than 700,000 rapid point-of-care tests for use in walk-in, drive-thru, mobile and pop-up specimen collections sites.

Read the rest of the update on the [Saskatchewan Health Authority website](#).

A message from the Saskatchewan Health Authority's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)

- **COVID-19 VARIANTS UPDATE- AS OF FEBRUARY 23, 2021**

B1.1.7 UK has been detected in two residents in the Regina zone. These individuals were tested at the end of January. Based on the contact investigation to date, there is no link to travel at this time but public health's investigation is on-going.

B1.351 SA (South Africa) has been detected in one resident in the North Central zone. This individual was tested at the end of January. Public health's investigation is on-going.

There is a presumptive case of B1.1.7 UK in one individual in the Saskatoon zone. The individual was transferred from out of province to Saskatoon for acute care. Whole genome sequencing will need to be completed to confirm the results. Public health's contact investigation is on-going.

This brings the provincial total of confirmed variant of concern cases to seven: six B1.1.7 UK including one presumptive case, and one B1.351 SA. [Access](#)

[Key Messages and a Q and A regarding the variants and testing.](#)

- **Public service announcement:**

It is everyone's responsibility to follow Public Health Orders and treat each other with respect

The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) is reminding the public that all people in an SHA facility, including staff, visitors, family and patients, must follow Public Health Orders and respect one another while in and around our facilities.

COVID-19 is everywhere in Saskatchewan and following all Public Health Orders issued by the Province of Saskatchewan is critical to keeping our population safe. SHA facilities and grounds are not exempt. While in any SHA facility, everyone must wear a medical mask at all times and

follow all safety precautions outlined in the Family Presence during Pandemic Policy . Please note that these family presence guidelines may differ based on COVID-19 activity in that particular facility, home or in the community.

If designated family members/supports refuse to wear a mask, wear it improperly or do not follow the Public Health Order and safety requirements as outlined in the safety guidelines outlined in the Family Presence during Pandemic Policy Directive, you may be refused entry to the facility or be asked to leave. If you are exempt from wearing a mask, ensure you have a copy of your exemption to show facility staff.

The SHA is a place of respect for clients, patients, residents, families, employees, and visitors. We all share the responsibility to treat each other with dignity and respect. Together, we can create and sustain a healthy, safe and caring environment we can all be proud of. Remember to honor diversity with dignity and empathy and value each person as an individual.

To ensure that you can safely enter SHA acute care facilities, please review these simple steps:

1. You will be provided with a medical face mask on arrival. You will need to wear this clean, medical grade mask, during your entire time in facility.
2. Be prepared to go through the COVID-19 screening questions and to answer them truthfully. All patients, family members/supports, and visitors must answer these questions, even if you are visiting the Emergency Department.
3. Understand safety precautions outlined in the Family Presence during Pandemic Policy at the facility you are going to.
4. Follow all directions given to you by SHA staff and physicians. Do not wander the hallways or enter in and out of hospital units. Use the call system if a patient needs care.

It is everyone's responsibility to follow the public health order and treat each other with respect at all times. Refusal to follow these rules may result in additional enforcement measures under the Public Health Order.

Read the public service announcement on the Saskatchewan Health Authority website:
<https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/news/releases/Pages/2021/February/It-is-everyones-responsibility-to-follow-Public-Health-Orders-and-treat-each-other-with-respect.aspx>

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Community Engagement and Communications
 Saskatchewan Health Authority

[-Saskatchewan releases COVID-19 vaccination delivery plan:](#) Phase 2 of vaccination sequencing will focus on the general population in 10-year increments, starting with ages 60 to 69. This phase will also include targeted vaccinations for adults and staff in group homes for persons with intellectual disabilities and shelters. Clinically extremely vulnerable adults will also be included as a priority. [Read more about the vaccine delivery phases.](#)

- ***/COVID-19/ Health-care worker sequencing in phase two of COVID-19 immunization campaign***

On February 9, 2021, the Government of Saskatchewan released the updated COVID-19 vaccine roll out plan. Phase two is based on the foundation of age as the main risk factor and is focused on vaccinating the general population. This will also more quickly target those individuals who have seen the most severe illness and death as a result of COVID-19.

Of note, the number of health-care workers (HCW) and physicians prioritized for Phase 1 did not change. All remaining HCWs and physicians will be sequenced with their age cohorts in Phase 2 which is expected to be rapidly administered beginning in April 2021, as available supplies increase. Health Care Workers will also be prioritized in phase 2 by way of their age or if they are considered clinically extremely vulnerable. A complete list of eligible health conditions is available on the [COVID-19 website](#).

Yesterday's information supersedes any draft information that had been previously shared.

The more people who receive vaccination, the more protected our entire population is as a whole, including the health care workforce.

Vaccinating by age is the most rapid and efficient way to deliver the immunizations consistently across the province, while also capturing vulnerable individuals within that age range. This will also more quickly target those individuals who have seen the most severe illness and death as a result of COVID-19.

Health providers also have the benefit of additional protections in place where they work, such as visiting restrictions and an ample supply of personal protective equipment and proper training in how to effectively use it.

It's recognized this news is disappointing to many working in health care. Your dedication to come to work each day in this pandemic environment is appreciated, despite the risks. If you have questions and concerns about current guidelines and protection measures, please speak with your manager or physician lead.

- ***/COVID-19/ International and inter-provincial travel during the COVID-19 pandemic***

A message from Dr. Susan Shaw, Chief Medical Officer, and Mike Northcott, Chief Human Resources Officer

It is difficult to identify a part of our lives that the COVID-19 pandemic has not affected. Provincial and federal public health orders form the basis of much of what we must do, or do differently. Provincial and federal travel advisories and restrictions impact our ability to travel whether for work or personal reasons.

This pandemic has been a dynamic event and public health orders have changed many times as we learn, adapt and work together to contain and reduce the spread of COVID-19. This is particularly true considering that public health orders regarding travel within Canada and internationally have recently changed and are likely to continue to change.

We want to provide you, our valued staff and physicians, with SHA's recommendation on inter-provincial and international travel and requirements and rules that are being imposed if you decide to travel outside or within Canada so that you can make fully informed decisions prior to traveling within Canada or internationally.

With new evidence of COVID-19 variants that are more transmissible and therefore more dangerous circulating in Canada and other countries, our Executive Leadership Team has endorsed and is imposing new measures effective immediately aimed at reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in our facilities and to the patients, clients and residents we serve.

[Read the full memo for more information on these measures.](#)

- **Below is the information that the Ministry has received from Health Canada about regulatory requirements for medical devices/masks, and testing of these products. Feel free to share with your members the information to ensure that standards are adhered in the interest of public safety.**

Class I medical devices such as surgical masks and respirators do not require premarket review, and are subject only to postmarket follow up under the Medical Devices Regulations (MDR). Health Canada has the tools allowing people to request test data, recall or stop the sale of any medical device if people have evidence that they are not safe and effective.

Manufacturers of Class I medical devices and importers and distributors of other medical devices in Canada require a medical device establishment licence (MDEL). This is an attestation registration that facilitates the postmarket surveillance of devices sold in Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/compliance-enforcement/establishment-licences/annual-review-documents/frequently-asked-questions-medical-device-establishment-licensing-fees.html>

The Interim order (IO) respecting the importation and sale of medical devices for use in relation to COVID-19 signed on March 18, 2020 allowed for the premarket review of Class I medical devices, if the manufacturer chose this pathway.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/drug-products/announcements/interim-order-importation-sale-medical-devices-covid-19.html>

Most (approximately 10 to 1) manufacturers of Class I medical devices continue to use the MDEL pathway to meet the requirements of the MDR. The Medical Devices Directorate (MDD) does conduct a premarket evaluation of the supporting evidence of some Class I manufacturers of surgical masks and respirators. Health Canada does not conduct the testing, but PHAC and the NRC are facilitating the testing for Canadian manufacturers. Manufacturers are responsible for the testing of their devices and submitting the results of that testing to support their IO applications.

Health Canada has published some guidance to help purchasers obtain good products. There

are many, many safe and effective masks and respirators sold only with an MDEL registration. Health Canada lists IO authorizations issued on a daily basis <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/covid19-industry/medical-devices/authorized/other.html>

- ***/COVID-19/ Saskatchewan announces phase two immunization rollout plan***

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 healthcare 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 throughout 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 and continue to watch for future updates around how you can become involved with this life-saving effort.

- /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 health care workers?

A: There is no evidence that health care workers need to take any new precautions. Practicing [safe use of PPE](#), as well as proper [donning and doffing of PPE](#), is the best way to keep safe. You also need to follow all continuous masking policies in facilities, [maintain a distance of at least six feet or two metres from those around you and not share any food or drink, even in break rooms](#).

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/ What if there are adverse reactions to the COVID-19 vaccine?

The concern for quality and safety doesn't end at the manufacturing and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. For as long as the vaccine is in use in Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Health Canada continue to monitor any adverse events related to the vaccine to ensure quality and safety.

Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) reports are prepared, which are reviewed by local Medical Health Officers (MHO). Recommendations are made and then these are forwarded to the province to collate before being sent to PHAC and Health Canada if concerns are raised related to the use of the vaccine. There is particular note taken when there are unusual AEFIs or when a specific batch of the vaccine may have more AEFIs.

There are numerous ways that AEFI's are reported, including by licensed health professionals, local public health units among other agencies involved in the administration of the vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccine is publicly funded, so adverse events must be reported to the local Public Health Unit for review and recommendations from the local Medical Health Officer. This is in addition to the ongoing work of researchers and manufacturers conducting additional studies and contributing information through an internal network that continues to monitor the vaccine.

These are some of the many ways that the ongoing quality and safety of the COVID-19 vaccine is assured.

Watch SHA Rounds for more information on the COVID-19 vaccine. For more information on COVID-19, please visit [Saskatchewan.ca/COVID19](https://saskatchewan.ca/COVID19).

- ***/COVID-19/ Vaccine: Second dose window extended to 42 days***

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recently advised the recommended period between first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccines can be extended up to 42 days.

The manufacturer's recommended window between doses for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is 21 days, while the Moderna vaccine has a 28 day window. Clinical trials for both of the vaccines had used a 19 to 42 day window for Pfizer-BioNTech and 21 to 42 day window for Moderna.

Immunization within the 42 day limit is still safe and effective for protecting against COVID-19. Some individuals will have their immunization appointments rescheduled due to this change. They will be individually contacted.

For more information on the COVID-19 vaccines, please visit [Saskatchewan.ca/COVID19](https://saskatchewan.ca/COVID19).

- **As a follow-up to a NIRO meeting beginning of February**, confirmation was received from MOH's CRU colleagues regarding writing face-to-face licensing examinations (which was questioned by other regulatory bodies).

Based on the wording of the Critical Services list licensing exams would fall under Government Services (just like other education services). Under the current Public Health Order (PHO) up to 30 people (max) would be allowed similar to other public events like conferences (assuming that all necessary COVID-19 safety guidelines are in place – e.g., 2

metres between desks/people, mandatory masking).

As for individuals from out of province, there would be no special requirements (e.g., proof of a negative COVID test, quarantine requirement). If there are any out of country applicants, they would have to quarantine for two weeks prior to writing the exam or doing any activity in person.