

COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout in the NWT

Mr. Speaker, today I am going to provide an update on COVID-19 vaccine rollout in the Northwest Territories.

As Members are aware, the NWT started delivering the COVID-19 vaccine to priority residents on December 31, 2020. Rollout began only a week after Health Canada approved the use of the Moderna vaccine in Canada, and only three days after the territory received its first shipment.

Since the beginning, the GNWT's approach to delivering the COVID-19 vaccine has been grounded in five core values: equity, cultural competency, evidence-based decision-making, flexibility, and trust. These values are outlined in detail in Immunity for our Communities: The Northwest Territories COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy, which was released on January 5, 2021.

Department of Health and Social Services and Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority staff have worked alongside local health care staff and community members to bring vaccines to residents across the North.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to share that the NWT has delivered 12,833 first doses and fully vaccinated 299 residents against COVID-19.

I also want to highlight that our vaccine teams visited all 33 communities in just under a month. Given the significant logistical and geographical challenges of this rollout, not to mention the cold chain requirements of the vaccine, this is an incredible achievement.

Throughout this process, the GNWT has made every effort to translate our vaccine communications into all 11 official languages, through informative handouts, videos, or audio on local community radio stations.

Local interpreters, knowledge keepers, and community leaders have been offered to be champions of the vaccine campaign and encourage its uptake.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to meet with Indigenous and community governments on a regular basis to keep them informed of our progress with vaccine delivery and listen to the needs of their communities.

In line with our reporting to the Public Health Agency of Canada, vaccine dose data continues to be updated weekly on the GNWT COVID-19 website. Helpful information and resources can also be found there including videos, fact sheets, and frequently asked questions about the vaccine.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Cabinet, I would like to take this opportunity to thank local health care staff, travelling vaccine teams, communities and residents for making our vaccine delivery so successful to date.

One of three NWT adults has already received their first dose. With every dose given in the NWT, we boost our territory's defense against COVID-19.

The NWT is leading the country with our ambitious delivery of first doses and has recently been commended by the federal Deputy Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Howard Njoo, who stated: "given the geography and the challenges of our winter weather, it is a credit to everyone involved in the vaccine rollout that it is progressing well and on track."

We would also like to express our gratitude to the federal government for their generous allotment of vaccine we have received to date.

Despite the recent announcement of the temporary delay of Moderna shipments to Canada, the NWT remains well positioned to receive enough vaccine for 75% of the adult

population by the end of March 2021. We knew that the allotment and delivery of doses were both outside of our control, which is why our team built a flexible vaccine delivery schedule to account for shipment delays, weather, or other logistical challenges.

Mr. Speaker, we want to reassure residents that we have a plan in place to optimize our vaccine supply over the coming weeks. We have received our third shipment of 4,700 vaccines and we are waiting for an update about the fourth shipment of vaccine. With that information in hand, we will announce any changes to our plan going forward.

I remain committed to keeping the public informed through scheduled media briefings as well as communications channels online, on the radio, and through on-the-ground staff in person.

It is important to remember that the public health measures and surveillance system that have protected NWT residents from COVID-19 so far are all still in place and working extremely well.

We will continue to use every possible tool to protect our territory from COVID-19, including: public health orders, effective wastewater testing, point of care testing, self-isolation and vaccine delivery. Together we can keep COVID 19 from jeopardizing our well-being and move toward loosening restrictions when conditions are right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.