
News Release

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ADDITIONAL COVID-19 TESTING TO OFFER RAPID RESULTS FOR NORTHERN MANITOBA PATIENTS

A federal-provincial partnership is bringing rapid-response COVID-19 testing to northern Manitoba, ensuring patients at higher risk of transmitting the virus are able to quickly access their results.

The Public Health Agency of Canada and the Manitoba First Nation Pandemic Response Co-ordination Team, in partnership with the First Nations Inuit Health Branch, have deployed four GeneXpert machines to be used by health-care providers in Thompson, The Pas, Norway House Cree Nation and the Percy E. Moore Hospital at Peguis First Nation, to supplement COVID-19 testing already being conducted at facilities throughout Manitoba's north. The GeneXpert machine, which can provide test results in as little as an hour, is already used in a number of Canadian jurisdictions to test for infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and influenza.

“As part of our response to COVID-19, we continue to work closely with provinces and territories to prevent the spread of the virus. The Public Health Agency of Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory deployed the machines into these remote communities and will continue to provide COVID-19 testing support to them,” said Patty Hajdu, Canada's Minister of Health.

“Measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within northern communities have been a high priority since efforts to fight this virus within our province began several months ago,” said Health, Seniors and Active Living Minister Cameron Friesen. “This new equipment has the capability to provide a COVID-19 test result in about an hour and will be used to quickly confirm the presence of the virus in those patients who may require additional support to self-isolate.”

Health-care providers will use the GeneXpert test kits for patients who may not be able to self-isolate easily if they test positive and therefore pose a higher risk of transmitting the virus. These

may include patients who are experiencing multiple symptoms associated with COVID-19 or have other factors that put them at greater risk of contracting the virus. Northern Manitoba patients who do not fall within one of these categories will continue to follow the established process, which includes transport to Cadham and Dynacare labs for COVID-19 testing.

“Residents throughout the north are to be commended for their vigilance in preventing the spread of this virus in our region,” said Dr. Michael Isaac, medical officer of health for the Northern Regional Health Authority. “Targeted rapid-response testing provides public health officials with another tool that will help us quickly suppress the spread of the virus if and when it reappears in our region.”

The first three GeneXpert machines have been installed. Two are located at hospitals operated by Indigenous Services Canada in Norway House Cree Nation and Peguis First Nation, and one is on loan to Shared Health for operation at Thompson General Hospital. A fourth machine, destined for St. Anthony’s General Hospital in The Pas, is expected to be operational in the coming weeks.

GeneXpert is a product manufactured in the United States and Canada receives a limited supply of devices based on the high demand for this product. As additional devices, cartridges and the necessary testing becomes available, phased expansion of GeneXpert testing can be considered on a broader scale.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, a number of northern-specific initiatives have been launched to protect residents in Northern Manitoba from the spread of COVID-19 including travel restrictions and the opening of community testing sites in Thompson, Flin Flon and The Pas. To date, three people living in northern Manitoba had tested positive for COVID-19. All three have since recovered. There have been no cases of COVID-19 involving people living on-reserve in Manitoba First Nations.

For current information on COVID-19 in Manitoba, such as steps people can take to reduce their risk and workplace guidance for businesses, visit www.manitoba.ca/covid19.

A comprehensive list of Manitoba government COVID-19 measures can be found at:
<https://manitoba.ca/bg/2020/04/covid19.html>.

For more information:

- Public information, contact Manitoba Government Inquiry: 1-866-626-4862 or 204-945-3744.
- Media requests for general information, contact Communications Services Manitoba: 204-945-3765.
- Media requests for ministerial comment, contact Communications and Stakeholder Relations: 204-945-4916.