

COVID Impacts

COVID-19 AND FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES IN MANITOBA, CANADA

As of the 2016 census, First Nations people account for approximately 13% of Manitoba's population. While Indigenous and non-Indigenous people lost their employment in the same ratios at the beginning of the pandemic, Indigenous held jobs have been slower to recover Canada-wide. In August 2020, the employment rate for Indigenous people was 50.7% (57% pre-pandemic) compared to 58% for non-Indigenous people (61.2% pre-pandemic). Statistics Canada reported 13% of Indigenous women stated some level of concern about violence in their home, twice as high as for non-Indigenous women (5%). This is echoed by Indigenous women's shelters who are concerned about domestic violence increases during the pandemic. Statistics Canada also reported that Indigenous participants (17%) are more likely to report an increase in crime in their neighbourhood during the COVID-19 pandemic than non-Indigenous participants (11%).

CONCERNS ON RESERVE

There are three long-term Boil Water Advisories in First Nations communities in Manitoba. This makes handwashing, a main component of COVID-19 prevention measures, challenging.

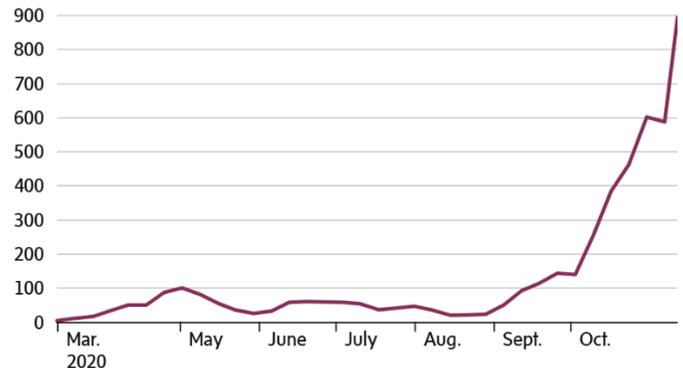
Little Grand Rapids in northern Manitoba evacuated COVID-19 patients to Winnipeg because of overcrowded housing. Combined with a lack of medical care, overcrowding and systemic home repair needs, northern First Nations are particularly vulnerable to outbreaks.

Social isolation due to COVID-19 measures on reserve should be monitored closely. According to a 2019 report from Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, suicide rates for on reserve populations is 56.87 per 100,000 compared to 11.36 for all other Manitobans.

INTERSECTING RISK FACTORS

Nearly fifty percent of adults living in First Nations communities report at least one chronic health condition, and another third report more than one diagnosis including diabetes (18.7%), high blood pressure (14%), arthritis (12.6%), high cholesterol (10.3%), and asthma (5.7%). Nearly half (47.5%) report high body mass indexes, all these conditions can lead to increased severity of COVID-19 outcomes.

Active COVID-19 infections on First Nations reserves across Canada



THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA

URBAN VULNERABILITIES

Lack of shelter inhibits social distancing and quarantine. Further, due to pre-existing health conditions, COVID-19 cases can be more severe. Winnipeg has introduced a COVID-19 shelter to provide the unhoused population a place to recover if they do acquire COVID-19. According to the 2018 Winnipeg Street Census, 65.9% of people experiencing homelessness were Indigenous.

Lack of nutritional food is a problem for Indigenous families. In Winnipeg, 35.1% of Indigenous people live in poverty compared to 14.3% of non-Indigenous people. The Federal Government is providing funds to Manitoba organizations, such as The Bear Clan, and the Manitoba Métis Federation began delivering food hampers.

RESILIENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY

Indigenous communities are finding new and innovative ways to meet the pandemic head-on. They are exercising their sovereignty in part by implemented community lockdowns to protect their members.

Four Manitoba First Nation communities created a coalition and successfully negotiated with Manitoba Hydro's Keeyask project to reduce the number of workers allowed to access the man camp in May 2020. Keeyask is currently having an outbreak, and so we may see the Cree partners retake action to protect their communities. Other communities have followed suit, closing roads and closing off their communities to others.

Many First Nations in Manitoba are conducting K-12 education primarily online. AMC and the Manitoba Metis Federation have also developed homeschool programs and resources to support their members who choose to keep their children at home during the pandemic.

In response to food security issues, some Manitoba First Nations Chiefs have called their members to return to the land to provide food for their communities. This included hunting, fishing, and picking berries and traditional medicines.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

This CIHR study found that more Indigenous people in Manitoba report experiencing almost twice the amount of discrimination in the health care system than in other parts of Canada (11.2% v. 6.5%).

Our CIHR study also found that Indigenous peoples in Manitoba are more likely to have suffered worse mental health outcomes since the beginning of the pandemic. 21.4% of respondents in Manitoba answered "bad or very bad" in our recent survey compared to 17.7% nationally. Indigenous people in Manitoba were also more likely to respond that their mental health has worsened since the pandemic first hit Canada in March (26.5% v. 24.2%), with only 17.3% reporting better since March (v. 20.3% across Canada).

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CBC – Remote learning for at least 11 Manitoba First Nations
APTN – Indigenous families explore cultural teachings while homeschooling during pandemic
CBC – Indigenous communities return to land to ensure adequate food supply during COVID-19 pandemic

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The researchers: A cross-national team of over 30 researchers led by Dr. Lori Wilkinson, Dr. Kiera Ladner and Dr. Jack Jedwab, received funding from CIHR for this study *COVID-19's differential impact on the mental and emotional health of Indigenous Peoples and Newcomers: A socioeconomic analysis of Canada, US and Mexico.*

The study: The team has been collecting data in Canada since March 9 and the United States since March 27, 2020. Ongoing survey waves now include Mexico. Our goal is to measure and follow the changes in attitudes, behaviours, health and socioeconomic outcomes among persons living in all three countries using a mixed methodology of surveys and unstructured interviews.

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