



Dr. Ibrahim Khan
Medical Health Officer
Indigenous Services Canada
Saskatchewan Region
1783 Hamilton Street
Regina, SK S4P 2B6
Office: (306) 564-9175

Dr. Nnamdi Ndubuka
Medical Health Officer
Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority
Chief Joseph Custer I.R. #201
Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation Office Complex
Prince Albert, SK S6V 6Z1
Office: (306) 953-5000

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World TB Day falls on March 24th each year and is a time to bring awareness of TB in Canada and around the world. Despite being **preventable** and **curable**, tuberculosis (TB) remains one of the most common infectious diseases in the world today.

The theme for World TB Day 2022 '**Invest to End TB. Save Lives**' – puts the emphasis on world leaders to commit to investments promised at the 2018 United Nations High-Level Meeting (UNHLM) on TB. According to the STOP TB Partnership, world leaders must step up and triple or quadruple the funding to save lives and end TB by 2030.

TB in Saskatchewan

Over the past decade, we have seen stable rates of TB across Saskatchewan, but the rates among First Nations remain consistently higher than the provincial average. In 2021, TB rates among First Nations was **6** times higher than the provincial rates. Of the active TB cases reported in Saskatchewan in 2021, **42%** were living in First Nations communities. An increasing trend of TB rates is also observed for persons living in First Nations communities. The 2021 rates of TB among First Nations was **2.7** times higher than the rates in 2020. Compared to 2020, there was a substantial increase (**175%**) in hospitalization among persons living in First Nation communities in 2021 and around **27%** of these hospitalized cases in 2021 have died. Compared to 2020, there has been **114%** increase in pediatric cases in 2021.

In response to the current situation, TB outbreaks have been declared in First Nation communities in Northern Saskatchewan 2021 and 2022.

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority (NITHA) have increased many supports and resources in an effort to find and treat TB in Saskatchewan.

Human Health Resources:

- In November and December 2021, ISC deployed 5 Registered Nurses for a total of 8 weeks to assist NITHA with TB outbreak response
- A casual Registered Nurse was employed by NITHA to support the TB outbreak response in Northern Saskatchewan communities
- Between October 2021-present, NITHA and ISC have provided >1120 nursing hours in the three outbreak communities
- Additional TB Workers were trained in NITHA communities, particularly communities with high TB cases to support case management and contact tracing
- Additional epidemiological and MHO support has been provided to address the outbreaks



TB Clinics (onsite, virtual, and mobile):

- In 2020, **41** TB clinics were held serving First Nation communities
- In 2021, there were **75** TB clinics held serving First Nation communities

In 2020, there were **320** TB contacts identified in Saskatchewan First Nation communities. In 2021, that number more than **doubled** to **681** TB contacts identified.

Technology:

- Northern Saskatchewan has one of the only portable chest x-ray machines in Canada. Two units have been purchased recently to support TB outbreak activities. Portable x-ray machines allow for mobile clinics where patients in remote locations are able to be seen much faster, leading to quicker diagnosis and treatment.
- GeneXpert testing for Mycobacterium Tuberculosis (MTB) was acquired by NITHA a few years ago in response to TB high-incidence communities in Northern Saskatchewan. The GeneXpert machines deployed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are also able to process MTB samples, which assists with earlier diagnosis and treatment.

Stigma and Discrimination:

- TB Program workers (TBPW) deliver Directly Observed Therapy (DOT), which is TB treatment, in their local communities. These workers are local TB champions, working under local Community Health Nurses (CHNs) with the TB program.
- The # of TB workers in NITHA outbreak communities has **doubled** since October 2021.
- TB is still highly stigmatized in Canada. When a First Nations client has to leave their home community for testing or treatment in a nearby urban center, they face increased stigma and difficulty navigating the health system outside of their community. ISC and NITHA work jointly to keep clients in their home community as much as possible.

Social Determinants of Health (SDoH):

- ISC and NITHA are working together to address the SDoH and determining their linkages to TB incidence.
- Factors such as overcrowded housing, poor nutrition, and access to health services all influence a client's risk of developing TB.
- Better housing initiatives as a TB intervention is being explored locally and nationally.
- Food initiatives, such as: partnerships with Nutrition North Canada, grow tunnels and grow towers, Good Food Boxes, and a TB diet allowance available through federal Income Assistance, are all available to most First Nation TB clients in Saskatchewan to support treatment and healing.



Indigenous Services Canada and Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority continue to collaborate with communities, provinces and territories, stakeholders, researchers and other experts in an effort to raise awareness, find and treat TB, and work towards Canada's goal to eliminate TB by 2030.

Respectfully,

Dr. Ibrahim Khan, Medical Health Officer
Indigenous Services Canada, SK Region

Dr. Nnamdi Ndubuka, Medical Health Officer
Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority Inc.