



NEWS RELEASE

Blackfoot Confederacy Gifts Surplus COVID-19 Vaccines at the Medicine Line

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April 20-21, 2021 Medicine Line, Siksikaitsitapii Territory – The Aamskapi’Piikuni Blackfeet Nation in Browning, Montana and the Siksikaitsitapii Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council (BCTC) collaborated in a historic government-to-government, nation-to-nation act of “reconciliation” to administer COVID-19 vaccines to members of the Blackfoot Confederacy - and residents of the nearby town of Cardston, Alberta.

The “gift” was made possible as the Aamskapi’Piikuni had a surplus of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines after immunizing the majority of its members and decided to offer the remaining vaccines as a gift, rather than wasting the vaccines – setting up a mobile clinic for northern Siksikaitsitapi tribal members at the Peigan-Carway Medicine Line crossing on Tuesday and Wednesday, during this challenging time of the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Piita’hkotokii James McNeely, the public information officer with the Blackfeet Tribe in Browning, it was a surplus of doses on the southern side of the border that prompted the reserve to contact Canadian officials to offer vaccines to their relatives in Alberta – and then opening it up to others wishing to get vaccinated.

“We started having some discussion about that about a month ago,” McNeely said. “We threw this together in the last seven, eight days and it really fell together. I am actually brought to tears today hearing that the efforts to assist our relatives and folks across the medicine line with vaccines has been awesome! Many of the folks cried today when they were able to get vaccinated.”

McNeely said the “act of reconciliation” came about when the Montana Blackfeet contacted Health Canada, provincial and state officials, and leaders of the Alberta Blackfoot First Nations to get the ball rolling, adding the majority of Montana Blackfoot members have received both doses.

“We’re probably at about 98 per cent (fully) vaccinated here on our reservation, (and so), through the efforts of the Blackfeet Tribe, BTBC, Southern Peigan Clinic, Blackfeet DES, Blackfoot Confederacy, Siksika Nation, Piikani Nation, Blood Tribe, U.S. Customs, Canada Border Services, Health officials from State and Provincial governments, the Federal government on both sides - individuals (First Nations and non-First Nations) have been vaccinated!”



The mobile vaccination site was set up in a drive-thru format, where participants aged 16 and older would drive up to the Carway crossing, provide their passport or status card, and received either the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine. McNeely said there were approximately 750 total doses available.

“We seen it as an opportunity to help those in need and that’s how First Nations people are on both sides of the border. Generous and kind.”

Since cars were turned directly around to head back into Canada, anyone who participated was given an exemption from the 14-day mandatory quarantine period for travellers returning to Canada by the Medical Officer of Health in Canada. Those in the Cardston area — 20 minutes away from the crossing — were also welcomed to get their shots on Wednesday when 298 were immunized.

Anatsi’sinski, Tisha Bromley-Wadsworth, BCTC Health Coordinator and Aapoyaakii, Bonnie Healy, Health Director for the Blackfoot Confederacy were an important part of the organizing team in Canada and was on hand to assist and give clients their exemption letters. “The mobile clinic was a great success, very emotional and no one who attended was turned away. We pulled the Medicine Line clinic together fairly quickly and worked with Indigenous Services Canada; Health Canada; Public Health Agency of Canada; and the Blackfoot Nations along with the Canadian and U.S. Border Services, who were very gracious and respectful.”

With the program ending on Wednesday afternoon, McNeely says the nation will return to the “Medicine Line” to facilitate another mobile clinic next week. “We (don’t) want to waste our extra vaccines, so we put this idea together and look what it did! Indian people are generous, and we’ve been vaccinating many people from all walks of life to help save lives and end this pandemic. This is a time for reconciliation and healing and (for) government-to-government relations to become stronger. Way to go everyone!”

The Aamskapi’Piikuni Blackfeet Nation administered over 400 vaccinations on Tuesday and Wednesday and plan to return to the Medicine Line - on the U.S. side of the Peigan-Carway Border Crossing - on April 28th and 29th to “gift” more COVID – 19 immunizations.

For more information and media inquiries or to register for vaccinations, please contact the BCTC at 587. 287.1100 or contact Anna’tsi’sinski at tishab@blackfootconfederacy.ca