



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COVID-19 Vaccination to Become Mandatory for WLFN Staff

Williams Lake First Nation (WLFN) announced today the implementation of the WLFN Workplace Vaccination Policy for all employees, and elected officials, requiring that all eligible individuals receive a complete series of an approved COVID-19 vaccine.

Dating back to January 2021, WLFN experienced a significant COVID-19 outbreak in the community of Sugar Cane that saw 47 WLFN members rapidly contract the virus over a short period of time. The Nation's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) led a robust response that included daily situational awareness updates, emergency isolation accommodations, regular delivery of supplies like groceries, medicine, and firewood, and financial supports for membership. WLFN's leadership also aggressively advocated for the early introduction of the Moderna vaccine, hosting multiple vaccination clinics for WLFN members at the Elizabeth Grouse Gymnasium in the community of Sugar Cane.

This policy will apply to all employees, elected officials, summer students, and volunteers whether they are working virtually, remotely, or on-site at a WLFN office or facility.

Kukpi7 (Chief) Willie Sellars was proud of the announcement, saying, "WLFN has a responsibility to maintain a safe work environment for our employees and the community they diligently serve. Ensuring that employees are fully vaccinated and continue to follow all public health measures in the workplace remains the best way to protect individuals and our community against COVID-19."

WLFN Councillor Shae Chelsea echoed the Chief's comments, offering that WLFN's leadership has a responsibility to take a firm position on the matter. "The duty of maximizing protection from the devastating COVID-19 virus and preventing its spread to our elders, youth and vulnerable community members has become the duty of us all. To avoid the inevitable transmission of this virus, our community has already made enormous sacrifices. We must continue our progressive endeavors to keep ourselves safe. The decisions we make today will be remembered for generations to come. Williams Lake First Nation's leadership will always base decisions on the wellbeing of our membership."

Those who are partially vaccinated will be required to receive their second dose within 35 days of the policy announcement. Unvaccinated employees can request an accommodation if they indicate they have a legitimate medical exemption certified by a medical professional. Employees who assert a religious belief or applicable prohibited grounds for discrimination under the Canada Human Rights Act



can also request an accommodation in writing. Employees that do not comply will be placed on an unpaid administrative leave for up to 3 months, or face termination.

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Aaron Mannella explained the necessity of requiring WLFN's over 80 government employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19, remarking, "COVID-19 represents a deadly threat to the beautiful resiliency of Indigenous people, already robbing the lives of loved ones in our community this year. On behalf of WLFN's administration, I am pleased to support Chief and Council's vision in announcing that our government will not stand by idly. This emphatic statement from WLFN's leadership commits that our workforce capacity will uphold the health and wellness of every single WLFN member we serve."

The WLFN Workplace Vaccination Policy may evolve as the pandemic situation changes or legislation and public health advice is altered. The policy is scheduled to be reviewed every six months.

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