

## Information from MB Government Health Officials

May 10, 2021



Hello Everyone,

The Hutterian Safety Council COVID-19 Task Force met with several Manitoba government and health officials last week. MLA Eileen Clark, Health Minister Heather Stefanson, and Chief Officer of Health Dr. Brent Roussin along with the HSC were involved in this meeting. They raised several points which they'd like to share with the Hutterite communities.

### COVID Impacts on Regular Health Care

First of all, they explained that Public Health Orders are in place to try to prevent the virus from spreading, not because Public Health wants to interfere with people's lives. The virus can increase hospitalization rates alarmingly which not only impacts COVID cases, but which also takes an overwhelming share of hospital space. Increased COVID cases impact all appointments including regularly scheduled diagnosis, surgeries, and appointments. Postponing these can have serious consequences for regular health care.

### Variant of Concern

Over time, many 100s and 1000s of variants of the virus spread among the population due to mutations. Some of these variants are less vigorous and some are more so. "Variants of concern" are those variants that have mutated and become more infectious or more deadly. In Manitoba, the UK variant (B117) is currently dominant and appears to be about 50-70% more transmissible. This means it spreads easier from one person to the next. Further, it appears to be more severe with about **two times the ICU admissions rate** compared to the wild strain, and has about **1.5 times the hospitalization rate**. In addition these variants of concern target a lot younger folks, with many in their 30s and 40s being in ICUs. Of course, as the covid cases climb, less care is available for non-COVID cases.

### Limiting Contacts & R-Value

Dr. Roussin and MLA Eileen Clark entreated Hutterites to limit their contacts, especially to limit the amount of travel to other provinces for non-essential purposes, because that could result in variants of concern being introduced to the Hutterites. The idea behind travel restrictions and lower contact rates is to decrease what they call the R-value. An R-value of one or higher, means that an infected person passes the virus on to at least one other person. When the R-value is higher than 1 the number of active cases grows. The goal is to decrease the R-value to below one, which means that fewer than one person catches the virus for every person that has it, resulting in the virus eventually dying out. R-values below 1 can be achieved through herd immunity which is achieved when a large percentage (70-80%) of people are vaccinated and can't pass it on anymore.

### Natural Immunity

We recognize that many Hutterites have had COVID, and we asked about the variants of concern for people with natural immunity. Dr. Roussin explained that natural immunity does convey some protection for at least 3 months (probably a lot more). There is some evidence that people can get a variant of concern even if they had the original "wild" type. He specifically cited the P1 variant out of the city of Manaus, Brazil, in which a town was hit with COVID early in 2020 with estimates of up to 70% of the inhabitants having been infected. The expectation was that they'd be protected by herd immunity, but by December of 2020, a new variant (P1) devastated that city a second time. Vaccination for people who have had COVID provides an additional layer of protection that's apparently even higher than for those who have the vaccine only.

### **Vaccine Adverse Reactions**

Public health officials strongly recommend that people get vaccinated to obtain protection from the virus and to help move Manitoba back to normal status. Currently, anyone over the age of 18 can [book](#) an appointment to get vaccinated.

As with any vaccine, there is always some risk to adverse reactions, but the risk of a severe outcome from vaccines is way way lower than the risk of catching COVID and having a severe outcome from it.

The doctor reiterated that the best vaccine is the first one available. There have been reports of people getting a very rare blood clot from the AstraZeneca vaccine. It's true that there is a small risk, but Dr. Roussin recognizes that the risk is so low that he himself took the AZ shot and recommends it to everyone, even his family members. For the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, there are currently no known side effects.

### **Conspiracy Theories**

Finally, we discussed the glut of misinformation and conspiracy theories out there. It's clear that Hutterites are not immune to this type of misinformation, and we'd urge people to be careful of falling for some of the illogical misinformation out there.

We as Hutterites are in a special situation: if we get sick, have to take time off work, etc. we are well taken care of. That's not the case for many citizens in Canada. So let's do our part to prevent the spread.

Please, let's be respectful and do our part to ensure that we don't contribute to the virus's spread. Let's be respectful and not spread misinformation about the virus or spread fake news about the governments' "plans to depopulate" the world. We should understand that there are some small risks to the vaccination, but surely we understand that the vaccination drive is not about decreasing the world's population, but rather about *saving lives!*

As people of faith, we should be careful with our words, careful about what we share with our friends and neighbours, and certainly careful about what we share on social media.

We wish you all good health and all the best

*The Hutterian Safety Council COVID-19 Taskforce*