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The Dene Nation Encourages All Members to Consider 'Arming Themselves' with a COVID-19 Immunizatio

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Yellowknife, Northwest Territories – May 06, 2021] – The Dene Nation is urging Dene peoples to consider getting vaccinated against COVID-19, with outbreaks and variants of concern on the rise, as the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) releases data showing low levels of vaccine uptake in many regions.

"After one of the hardest years emotionally, mentally, and economically across Denendeh, we are so close to pushing through and emerging back into a sense of normal. Despite how close it feels, we know that in order to return to normal we will need the majority of our people to be vaccinated to create the effect of herd immunity," said National Chief Norman Yakeleya. "However, across the NWT where vaccines have been prioritized for Indigenous populations, it is clear that we must be providing greater education, information, and access in order to increase uptake of COVID-19 vaccines. We know that these vaccines are safe, and they are our best defense against COVID-19, but we need to make sure that information is reaching our people effectively."

Recent data released from the GNWT is showing that some regions are arming themselves with vaccines at higher rates than others. Sadly, according to the data, regions densely populated by Dene peoples are showing much lower levels of vaccine uptake. Presently, Tłı̨chǫ has the lowest rate of injected doses, currently at 36 per cent. In DehCho, 32 per cent of eligible adults have not received their vaccine, and in Sahtu the number is even higher at 46 per cent. Even though the NWT has a low active caseload overall, Yellowknife's current outbreak is a stark reminder that the pandemic does, and will, change rapidly -- and these risks are even higher in vulnerable Dene communities. Despite low uptake in these regions, the data is clear: Vaccines are responsible for reducing more than 80 per cent of active coronavirus cases in Indigenous populations across Canada.

"Modern medicines, such as the COVID-19 vaccine, in relationship with our traditional teachings and our ancestors' prayers, will work together to protect us. I trust the science and our teachings. I armed myself with the vaccine after seeking credible information from trusted resources, such as Health Canada and our Elders. Under our Knowledge Holders' advice, I offered protocol and asked the Creator to bless it,"continued Yakeleya. "To continue to live strong, healthy, and with a good mind we need our stories, our celebrations, our feasts, our traditions, our hunts, our powwows, our dances, and our drum beats. To get these things back, we need each other. We need each other safe. We have come a long way since the pandemic first hit our regions. We have sacrificed a lot to keep our communities safe and healthy. Now, we are seeing the beginning of the end of this challenging time. Together, I know that we will beat this virus. Our people are resilient. However, in order to do so, we must arm ourselves and encourage all those eligible to get vaccinated. If you haven't already, I am asking you to be a warrior for your community, for your family, for your Elders, for your friends, and for your Nation. Seek credible information with a good mind. Consider arming yourself with a vaccine today" concluded Yakeyela.

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