

COVID-19 MESSAGE FROM ISC BC REGION

UPDATE #17 / April 7, 2020

Good afternoon,

As the days settle into weeks it can be easy for a new strange sense of normal to descend. While this is a sign that we are coping with the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, the danger is that we may forget to take all the necessary public health precautions to prevent the further spread of COVID-19.

This can be especially true as we look ahead to a long weekend that is typically full of extended family gatherings and religious and cultural ceremonies. Instead as we plan for our next holiday, we encourage you to join us as we renew — and redouble if possible — our efforts to battle this pandemic. It is for our own protection and that of your communities.

For the safety of everyone, rules and orders by the Provincial Health Officer regarding gatherings still apply over the long weekend. The FNHA supports these orders and advises against any kind of gathering, as this is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect our communities.

We would also like to highlight an **audio recording of Senior Medical Officer Dr. Nel Wieman, First Nation Health Authority**, as she talks to Communications Manager Stephanie Slater about COVID-19:

- Why it's important to act like you already have the virus
- Prevention tips and why they work
- The impact on ceremonial gatherings and other important events
- The impact on people's mental health

Lastly, we want to assure you that we are sensitive to the fact that so many of you are working at an unprecedented intensity, at personal risk and with significant impact on your own personal and family lives. We see you and hear your stories. Words aren't adequate, but they are heartfelt — thank you for continuing to support the health of First Nations people and all British Columbians.

QUESTIONS OF THE DAY (1/2)

(From our partners at the FNHA)

Why should I avoid public gatherings?

Attending even small gatherings increases the risk of exposure to COVID-19. This increases the chance of participants becoming infected and carrying the virus into their communities and passing it on to vulnerable friends and family, particularly Elders and people with chronic health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, and compromised immune systems.

We understand people will be disappointed at the postponement of events and travel plans but our common priority now is to slow the spread of disease, contain the chain of transmission, and protect our most vulnerable family and community members from illness and possibly death.



QUESTIONS OF THE DAY (2/2)

(From our partners at the FNHA)

Is it safe to participate in cultural gatherings (e.g., sweat lodges, potlatches, ceremonies and other gatherings)?

The FNHA acknowledges the significance of cultural gatherings in our communities and the lingering negative memories and trauma caused by the banning of cultural activities in the past. It is no longer safe to participate in cultural gatherings due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 in BC. The FNHA recommends the immediate cancellation or postponement of all cultural events.

As an alternative, you could modify your cultural practice or ceremony to ensure physical distancing of at least two metres (six feet). You could also conduct ceremonies with only family members who live in the same household (and have a larger event later), or consider an alternative such as a FaceTime event.

The FNHA advises that you temporarily suspend traditional practices like sweat lodges and pipe ceremonies. Doing a sweat and being near others who are sweating could easily lead to transmission of the virus to others. And there is a strong likelihood during a pipe ceremony of transmitting the virus via saliva when the pipe is passed from one person to the next.

For more information, read this [FNHA advisory](#).

NATIONAL INFORMATION

- For the Canada Emergency Revenue Benefit see: [Canada Revenue Agency website](#) or, [Service Canada website](#)
- [Indigenous Community Support Fund: Urban and off-reserve Indigenous organizations and communities](#)

USEFUL LINKS

- [First Nations Health Authority](#)
Summary Page of COVID-19 information and response.
- [COVID-19 BC Support App and Self-Assessment Tool](#)
The app will let you receive the latest updates, trusted resources, and alerts. The Self-Assessment Tool is built in.
- [First Nations Public Service Secretariat](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
Epidemiological summary of COVID-19 cases in Canada (includes map and other data).

REGIONAL CONTACTS

We've set up a dedicated email for any non-health COVID-19-related questions and requests:

aadnc.iscbccovid19.aandc@canada.ca

The email address and other information are also available on the [FNPS website](#).

