



FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

FNLC COVID-19 Guidance Package for Leaders

Updated on: May 25, 2020

The First Nations Leadership Council compiled a guide package for BC First Nations leaders in response to COVID-19. We will continue to update this document as more information becomes available.

Here is what's included in this document:

1. Important Steps for Communities to Take
2. Funding to Support First Nations' Response to COVID-19
3. Information on Gatherings
4. Community Closure Guidelines
5. Student Assessment and Reporting Considerations
6. Maintaining Essential Services During COVID-19
7. Helping Rural, Remote and Indigenous Communities Respond to COVID-19

1. Important Steps for Communities to Take

The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) has advised all communities to prepare for the possible spread of coronavirus. The following is a list of steps each community should take as detailed by the FNHA. You can download a PDF version of these steps here:

www.fnha.ca/AboutSite/NewsAndEventsSite/NewsSite/Documents/FNHA-Coronavirus-Info-Important-Steps-for-Communities-to-Take.pdf

British Columbia's health system has a detailed plan in place should the coronavirus known as COVID-19 spread across the province.

Bearing that in mind, please approach these preparations with calm in our hearts and trust in each other to avoid causing unnecessary anxiety in our communities.

However, there are a number of steps First Nations communities can take now to prepare for the possibility the virus spreads more widely:

- Review your existing Communicable Disease Emergency Plan (Pandemic Plan) and update it as needed. Make sure all of the contact information is correct and that people are aware of what is expected of them.
- Review the community's supply of essentials.
- Where there is one, check to see if the community health centre or nursing stations requires additional support to prepare for possible coronavirus patients.
- Train and prepare staff to cover for each other as people may need time off to care for their families or for themselves.
- Continue to follow the First Nations Health Authority communications channels for timely and reliable information on the outbreak.
- Involve the whole community in efforts to prevent the spread of the virus by sharing tips on how to prevent its spread, as well as how to recognize the symptoms in each other. The FNHA will provide further updates as the situation evolves.

Band offices and other community organizations should consider taking the following measures to prevent the virus spreading in the workplace.

- Promote frequent hand washing with soap and water, use hand sanitizer.
- Frequent cleaning and sanitizing of door handles, washrooms and surfaces that are frequently touched is important.
- Recommend people sneeze and cough into a tissue or their elbow.
- Encourage people to stay home if they are sick.
- Where possible, allow and enable people to work from home.

Finally, take a look at the community's financial planning and consider budget implications should emergency funds be needed.

2. Funding to Support First Nations' Response to COVID-19

The Government of Canada recently announced two funding tracks through which First Nations communities can access additional COVID-19 emergency public health support: (a) [100 million for federal areas of responsibility](#) coordinated in BC by the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), and (b) \$305 million for a new [Indigenous Community Support Fund](#).

First Nations may also access support for non-health related COVID-19 costs through the [Emergency Management Assistance Program \(EMAP\)](#).

\$100 Million in Funding Coordinated through FNHA

In BC, First Nation and Inuit Health Branch will be supporting the [First Nations Health Authority \(FNHA\)](#) who is coordinating community requests for communities, which are transferred under their health authority in this province.

Examples of public-health related emergency eligible expenditures include: community or service provider level infection prevention and control supplies (e.g. community training, soap, etc.), mental health services, adaptation of community space.

The FNHA has prepared a guide on eligible expenses, how communities can apply, including sample forms on their website:

<https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA-COVID-19-BC-First-Nations-Community-Guide-for-Additional-Supports-Needed.pdf>

Applications should be submitted to: COVID19needs@fnha.ca

Indigenous Community Support Fund

The \$305 million [Indigenous Community Support Fund](#) will provide \$41,129,000 to First Nations in BC. These funds can be used for measures including, but not limited to: support for Elders and vulnerable community members, measures to address food

insecurity, educational and other support for children, mental health assistance and emergency response services, preparedness measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

There are no deadlines for communities to submit requests and funding will flow through existing agreements. On-reserve and self-governing First Nations communities will receive funding directly from ISC.

Indigenous organizations and communities providing services to Indigenous peoples in urban centres or off reserve need to apply through a call for proposals. The call was launched April 6, 2020 and the deadline to submit proposals is April 13, 2020.

Information on how to apply, eligibility and criteria for selection is available here:
<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1585928331845/1585928356443>

To apply or for further questions on the Indigenous Community Support Fund, email: aadnc.icsfru-fscaru.aandc@canada.ca

Support Through Emergency Management Assistance Program (EMAP)

In addition to public health related emergency supports, First Nation communities on reserve may need emergency assistance services that can be provided through the [Emergency Management Assistance Program \(EMAP\)](#) which is usually reserved for natural disaster related emergencies but is now open to non-health related COVID-19 costs.

Examples of COVID-19 related costs include incremental wage costs, including temporary hires and overtime, rental of special equipment, set-up costs for one-time preventative measures, insurance and fuel costs of response vehicles, care, feeding and accommodation of human resources separate from health care professionals, if required (contractors and temporary hires), communications (satellite phones, cell phone usage above and beyond normal use), water and household supplies (i.e., providing food and water if there is a concern that a shortage may occur).

The Emergency Management Assistance Program administered by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC).

EMAP COVID-19 related enquiries can be directed to:
aadnc.iscbccovid19.aandc@canada.ca or 604-209-9709.

The ISC BC Region, Emergency Management Duty Officer can also be reached at
bcaandc.do@canada.ca

\$75 Million for First Nations living in urban centres and off-reserve

On May 15, Ottawa announced an extra \$75 million in pandemic funding to address the critical needs of First Nations living in urban centres and off-reserve.

The money will go to community groups that give First Nations access to everything from groceries and mental health services to computers so their kids can keep up with school work.

More information about this new funding will be made available soon.

3. Information on Gatherings

The First Nations Health Authority, the First Nations Health Council and the First Nations Health Directors Association have advised against all gatherings to prevent COVID-19 spreading. They have released the following statement, which can be downloaded as a PDF here:

www.fnha.ca/AboutSite/NewsAndEventsSite/NewsSite/Documents/Media-Release-FNHA-FNHC-FNHDA-Advise-Against-All-Gatherings-to-Prevent-COVID-19-Spreading.pdf

The First Nations Health Authority, the First Nations Health Council and the First Nations Health Directors Association are strongly advising communities to cancel or postpone all community and cultural gatherings until the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.

With the increasing evidence about the rapid spread of COVID-19 in British Columbia, and on the advice of public health physicians, the First Nations Health Authority also strongly recommends against any unnecessary travel.

Furthermore, given the unprecedented risk COVID-19 presents, physical distancing is absolutely necessary to prevent serious illness and death in our communities. Please stay at least six feet apart from each other at all time. We are particularly concerned about the Elders and Knowledge Keepers, young children, and those with chronic disease. It is imperative that all of us take responsibility to care for each other by following this public health advice.

We do not make this recommendation lightly—we acknowledge the significance of cultural gatherings and events for First Nations communities, but from a public health standpoint we have the responsibility to communicate the severity of this rapidly evolving situation. Please cancel upcoming events, and reschedule for after this pandemic has passed.

Quotes:

Dr. Shannon McDonald, FNHA Deputy Chief Medical Officer

“COVID-19 is a severe respiratory disease that is very easy to transmit from person to person, and that can have deadly consequences. It is in our province and potentially in your community. It only takes one person to carry the disease to their family and community. Gatherings of any kind present an unreasonable risk.

We have a very brief opportunity to prevent the spread and the devastating consequences of this disease in our communities. Any gathering where close contact occurs can cause transmission and none of us are immune. I am especially worried about our Elders, young children and those with underlying health issues.”

Colleen Erickson, FNHA Board Chair

"The responsibility lies with each and every one of us to do everything possible to protect ourselves so in turn we protect our families, our elders and community. Especially our Elders who are the keepers of our oral history, language and age old wisdom."

Charlene Belleau, Chair, First Nations Health Council

“The FNHC calls on Hereditary Chiefs, Matriarchs and Spiritual Leaders to help community leadership reinforce the critical public health advice to postpone cultural gatherings and large ceremonies. Please heed this critical advice – our spiritual teachings place our Elders and most vulnerable citizens at the forefront of our collective responsibilities to our Nations. During this time of self-isolation and social distancing

(6-feet from each other), please use this time for prayer and self-reflection, stay safe and protect the health of you and your family.”

Keith Marshall, President, First Nations Health Directors Association

“We thank and acknowledge those working on the front lines to support community health, including the 150+ Health Directors in BC and our nurses and health professionals. We especially appreciate the work of Health Directors, Chiefs and health boards to ensure community health centres remain open for essential services in this crisis; and we encourage all Health Directors to practice self-care during this extraordinary time.”

Learn more:

Go to www.fnha.ca/coronavirus for up-to-date information on COVID-19 and resources for you community.

For more on this topic please see this article:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/covid-suspend-sweat-lodges-pi-pe-ceremonies-1.5504541>

4. Community Closure Guidelines

The FNLC recommends the following guideline when enacting a community closure.

1. Coordinate with local law enforcement to ensure they know you are closing the community.
2. Have an emergency provisions plan in place; don't close your community if you may run out of food and essential goods.
3. Ensure you have a quarantine plan in place for people returning to the community; they should self-isolate for 14 days, along with anyone living with them. Ensure that there are community members willing and able to deliver food and essential goods to isolated members.
4. Communicate with your membership via all channels available to you, such as social media, phone calls, newsletters, email, and old fashioned door knocking that you are planning on closing the community, and the details of your plans.
5. Contact local media to help you spread the message
6. Pass a Band council resolution to put the closure in place

7. Continue communicating with your members and your neighbouring communities the status of the closure daily.

Download The Template – Local First Nation State Of Emergency Public Alert / Travel Limitation Notice here:

https://www.fnlcemergency.ca/sites/default/files/docs/template_re_fn_state_of_emergency_declarations_-_v3_0.docx

5. Student Assessment and Reporting Considerations

As schools are planning for continuous learning opportunities while classes are suspended, the [First Nations Education Steering Committee](#) (FNEESC) and [First Nations Schools Association](#) (FNSA) recognize that First Nations have authority for the education of their citizens, including having full responsibility for their own schools. How individual First Nations choose to address continued learning while their schools are closed will vary from community to community, but it is almost certain that learning will look very different from the conventional school day.

It is also critical to consider carefully how assessment and reporting will be handled during this unprecedented time to promote continued progress for students.

Respecting that First Nations and First Nations schools will appropriately make their own decisions related to student assessment and reporting, FNEESC and FNSA are pleased to share the attached [discussion paper related to assessing student learning, assigning final grades](#), and preparing report cards during this time of significant change. The document includes suggestions from FNEESC and FNSA.

6. Maintaining Essential Services During COVID-19

The First Nations Health Authority has prepared the following guide to maintaining essential services during COVID-19 which you can consult in its entirety here:

<https://www.fnha.ca/about/news-and-events/news/maintaining-essential-services-during-covid-19>

As we face the challenges of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, our strength is grounded in our collective sense of wellbeing and our First Nations perspective on

health and wellness. Given the legacy of colonialism, it's natural that we react protectively in the best interest of our people. We've heard how communities are using 'two-eyed seeing' to follow critical public health advice while drawing upon our culture and traditions to sustain them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Working alongside the health professionals in your communities, you're playing a key role to protect the safety, health and wellbeing of our people. To ensure we maintain essential services during this time – keeping health centres, band offices and essential businesses open – and support your pandemic response plans, we offer these recommendations to Chiefs and leaders. We understand you're making decisions that fit community needs; and we recommend that communities consider health services as essential programs, re-assigning staff or rotating work duties to allow for physical distancing in offices. As needed, deploy people to:

- Monitor and/or liaise with the FNHA and local Emergency Operation Centres;
- Answer phones, direct inquiries, provide community bulletins and information via social media;
- Maintain accessibility to services and supports for vulnerable community members with high health needs;
- Provide support and act as liaisons for youth and Elders; and
- Provide childcare support for parents working in essential service jobs.

The FNHA, FNHC and FNHDA recognize how leaders are working in the best interest of their communities to make sure everyone is healthy and safe during this time. We raise our hands to you for providing leadership, reassurance and trusted information. A few reminders:

- It is more important than ever to observe the public health guidelines that support our collective health. For the safety of everyone, rules and orders by the Provincial Health Officer regarding gatherings still apply, including in the case of funerals and memorials. We support these orders and advise against any gathering to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect our communities.
- Review 1) the FNHA's [Community Guide](#) for information on supports for community leaders (e.g, PPE ordering details, expense eligibility) and 2) [Employers Guide to COVID-19](#).

The FNHA has provided correspondence confirming that Funding Arrangements have been extended and that funding releases will continue based on existing schedules to ensure services continue without interruption. Any questions can be directed to Tanya Duncan, Director, Funding Arrangements, at Tanya.Duncan@fnha.ca.

Your FNHC regional representatives and FNHDA Health Directors are also a source of information and support during this crisis – please call on them.

7. Helping rural, remote and Indigenous communities respond to COVID-19

A new collaborative framework has been developed through a partnership between the First Nations Health Authority, Northern Health and Provincial Health Services Authority. The framework outlines immediate actions to improve health-care services and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- improved medical transportation options to larger centres, including flight and ambulance;
- housing options for people looking to self-isolate near their families while remaining in their home communities;
- new and faster COVID-19 testing technology;
- culturally safe contact tracing that respects privacy in small communities;
- access to Virtual Doctor of the Day, a program that connects First Nations members and their families in remote communities to a doctor or nurse practitioner using videoconferencing;
- options for accommodation near larger centres with more medical services; and
- increased mental-health supports in communities.

Local leadership will determine how these services operate in their communities, with the priority being to ensure residents can make informed choices about how they receive care.

Access Virtual Doctor of the Day here:

<https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/ehealth/virtual-doctor-of-the-day>