

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Bulletin to Ontario First Nations

April 1, 2020

First Nations and Inuit Health Branch ON Region

“We have taken immediate, significant and decisive action to First Nations, Inuit and Métis in preparing for and addressing needs related to COVID-19. These measures are the product of vital discussions with Indigenous leadership and communities across Canada. This new Indigenous Community Support Fund will further support First Nations, Inuit and Métis leaders in taking action to address the evolving needs of their population and in making their own decisions about where critical support is needed to quickly address this public health emergency.”

The Honourable Marc Miller
Minister of Indigenous Services

ADDRESSING URGENT NEEDS IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES RELATED TO COVID-19

March 26, 2020 — Ottawa, Algonquin Territory, Ontario — Indigenous Services Canada

“The health, safety and well-being of all people in Canada, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, is and will remain a top priority for all. Canada recognizes that First Nation, Inuit and Métis are among the most vulnerable, and that during this crisis, in particular, those in remote and fly-in only parts of the country are uniquely vulnerable. Communities are incredibly resilient and full of solutions and innovative ideas. This is why we must support distinctions-based measures to improve public health response for Indigenous communities and provide them with the flexibility they need to address the specific needs identified by communities and their members.”

The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services, has outlined details of the \$305 million new distinctions-based Indigenous Community Support Fund to address immediate needs in First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation communities related to COVID-19.

The Indigenous Community Support Fund will be distributed nationally as follows:

- \$215 million for First Nations will be allocated to each First Nation based on their population, remoteness and community well-being;
- \$45 million for Inuit People will flow to each of the four land claims organizations through an allocation determined by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and regional Inuit land claims organizations;
- \$30 million for Métis Nation communities will flow through each of the Governing Members;



- \$15 million for regional and urban Indigenous organizations supporting their members living away from their communities, and to regional organizations such as Friendship Centres and the Métis Settlements General Council of Alberta.

These new funds will give Indigenous leadership the flexibility needed to address the immediate needs in their communities as they prepare for and react to the spread of COVID-19. These funds could 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.

The Fund is in addition to the needs-based funding designated for First Nations, Inuit and Metis through the COVID-19 Response Fund announced on March 11, 2020, and to the initial \$50 million provided to support the immediate public health response.

To support women and children fleeing violence, we have also created a \$10 million fund for emergency family violence prevention shelters on reserve and in Yukon, as announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on March 18, 2020.

The Indigenous Community Support Fund is also in addition to needs-based support to address public health issues, including the provision of personal protective equipment, testing and health care personnel. It is also in addition to needs-based funding to address the growth in demand for income assistance and for emergency planning programming.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis will also benefit from all of the Government of Canada's efforts to support the health protection and care response to COVID-19, and to reduce the impact on workers and businesses. We recognize that more support may be needed and we will continue to offer financial support for Indigenous communities to meet their evolving needs.

QUICK FACTS

- More information on how the Indigenous Community Support Fund will be distributed is available at www.canada.ca/coronavirus-info-indigenous.
- Indigenous people and businesses are encouraged to review other measures which have been made available through the Government of Canada's [COVID-19 Economic Response Plan](#), through which they may receive further support.
- As a reminder, the best way to mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19 is to practice physical distancing, frequent hand washing/sanitizing, coughing and sneezing etiquette and staying home if feeling ill. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces, such as toys and door handles.
- Indigenous Services Canada is working fast with quick turnaround times for processing personal protective equipment requests to ensure First Nation communities are ready to respond to COVID-19 as effectively as possible.

RELATED PRODUCTS AND ASSOCIATED LINKS

[Indigenous Community Support Fund – Breakdown by region](#)
[Government of Canada’s COVID-19 Economic Response Plan](#)
[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and Indigenous communities](#)
[Prime Minister outlines Canada’s COVID-19 response](#)

COORDINATING EFFORTS BETWEEN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL OFFICES AND COMMUNITIES

Several daily calls have been established between the National and Regional offices to ensure that all communications are shared and we are working together toward the same goal. The Deputy Minister is updated on a daily basis and senior officials continue to address First Nations’ specific needs and emerging issues. The National and Regional offices have and will continue to contact all levels of First Nation Leadership, including community, Tribal Council and Indigenous Representative Organization Chiefs in an effort to keep everyone informed. We continue to encourage Leadership to share all information in an effort to keep every member of every community informed, and to share their concerns with us through our Chiefs’ calls and bulletins.

DR. MAHER UPDATE

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

There is currently a global shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), including masks and hand sanitizer. Doctors and nurses have been directed to ration PPEs in hospitals across the country to ensure supply.

Masks

The World Health Organization, Public Health Agency of Canada, and other public health authorities do not recommend the use of surgical masks by healthy people or those without symptoms to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Wearing a mask when not sick may give people a false sense of security and can lead them to not taking essential preventative measures such as good hand washing/sanitizing and physical distancing.

Additionally, there is a potential risk of infection with improper mask use (e.g., frequency of changing the mask) and disposal. Furthermore, the use of masks by healthy individuals directly affects the supply available to health care workers, who require these materials to provide care.

Our priority is to ensure that nursing staff in frontline care have the masks and other PPE they need to work in and protect their communities. It is recommended that health care workers wear a surgical mask when entering a room where patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection may be or are isolating. A respirator (e.g., N95), including eye protection, should be used when conducting aerosol-generating medical procedures.

The only circumstances when the use of a surgical mask is recommended for non-health care workers in the community is:

- For those with COVID-19 who are in close contact with others in the home;
- When people who have COVID-19 must leave the home for medical attention, and;
- By healthy individuals providing care for a person with COVID-19. In these cases, the use of a surgical mask alone is not sufficient to prevent the spread of illness and should be combined with other infection prevention and control measures.

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) buys and maintains a supply of personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer for use in First Nation communities to protect health care staff delivering services. Regional and national staff are identifying PPE needs and are helping communities assess their response for the need of PPE. Numerous requests have been received and many orders have been shipped and will be arriving shortly in communities. Due to the shortage, allocations for PPE are now being provided on a monthly basis. The national office is trying to locate reliable suppliers of PPE to respond more quickly to incoming requests.

With a limited supply on hand, we are getting as many supplies for non-health care workers out to communities for a one-month period and we will continue to provide supplies as they become available. Many First Nations have procured PPE with local suppliers. If you have managed to do so, we ask that, where possible, you share your equipment with neighboring communities if your supplies allow it.

Testing

Supplies for testing (swabs) continues to be a challenge both provincially and nationally. The province and Public Health Agency of Canada are investigating additional testing materials, additional lab processing of swabs, and are working with research facilities to look at alternative ways of testing for COVID-19.

The Department has received a notification from the American Food and Drug Administration on the potential fraudulent activities of testing and treatment of the COVID-19. FNIHB-ON-Response Team is asking participants to use reliable sources for any information concerning COVID-19 and to notify their communities of the fraudulent activities.

It is important to note that communities do not require an assessment centre to be set up to get tested. Please contact the local public health unit's website to find your nearest testing centre. ISC-FNIHB will work with the province to increase testing access for First Nations communities and will provide regular updates.

Isolation Centres

It is important to know that there is no need to go to an isolation centre to get better; most individuals will get better at home unless they need to be hospitalized. Many communities are looking at creating isolation centres because overcrowding causes challenges with isolation of individuals within their home. Equipment such as isolation structures will be prioritized for those communities who are unable to safely isolate ill community members. This would be a back-up

measure, in the event that communities' existing spaces - such as schools, community centres and arenas –are not sufficient. FNIHB ON is working to obtain technical guidance on how to safely set up isolation centres and the appropriate infection prevention and control practices in such centres. It is extremely important that partners and communities work together to prevent infection spread.

Nursing

Nursing has put together a task team to review a list of over 100 nurses who have expressed their interest in working in First Nations communities during this pandemic. We continue working with our partners to attract nurses, and regular hiring processes have been modified to recruit more quickly and expand the number of nurses willing and available to provide health care and advice.

Nurses have been training on COVID-19 practises and procedures since the end of January, and are participating in daily update calls.. Nurse's are screened for COVID-19 infection prior to their deployment to communities and daily while in community.

Individual Action/Whole Community Effort

All community members should be encouraged to take individual infection prevention and control measures (e.g., hand washing/sanitizing, physical distancing) and respect community public health measures (e.g., cancellations of gatherings, avoiding crowding) to slow or stop the spread of COVID-19.

- **Practice physical distancing:** avoid crowds and large gatherings, try to keep at least two metres (six feet) away from other people.
- **Practice good hygiene:** wash your hands for 20 second with soap and water; avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands; clean areas of your home or office that are touched often with regular household cleaners or diluted bleach (1 part bleach to 9 parts water):

NON-INSURED HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

Attached with this Bulletin is a NIHB Program Update that provides information relevant to the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. This information will be posted to the Canada.ca website later this week. We invite you to share and circulate the attached version by email.

Similar information for medical supplies and equipment (MS&E) providers has been distributed by Express Scripts Canada, and can be accessed at the links below:

English: <https://provider.express-scripts.ca/medical-supplies-and-equipment/bulletins>

French: <https://fr.provider.express-scripts.ca/medical-supplies-and-equipment/bulletins>

FIRST NATIONS HEALTH MANAGERS ASSOCIATION (FNHMA) COVID-19 TOWN HALL VIDEOS

If you missed it, the FNHMA/APTN virtual Town Hall that took place March 25, 2020, with senior FNIHB officials to discuss how COVID-19 is affecting health managers, frontline health workers and First Nation communities is available in video format below:

English Edited: <http://ihtoday.ca/virtual-town-hall-english/>

SOCIAL MEDIA HANDLES

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