

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

Weekly Bulletin to First Nations in Ontario: March 10, 2020

First Nations and Inuit Health Branch ON Region

This is the first of the weekly bulletins, which will provide updated information about COVID-19. In January 2020, a novel (new) coronavirus was identified as the cause of an outbreak of pneumonia in China, and has since spread to countries around the world.

The situation is rapidly evolving and Public Health Ontario, along with the Ministry of Health, is closely monitoring the outbreak, conducting surveillance and appropriate laboratory testing, and providing public health and infection control guidance.

At the time of writing, there have been 35 cases confirmed in Ontario. All cases have been in the Greater Toronto Area, London, and Waterloo. Additional information about the situation in Ontario can be found on the [Ministry of Health website](#).

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is closely monitoring the spread of COVID-19 in other countries. Please consult the destination page on [travel.gc.ca](#) for the [latest travel advice](#).

COVID-19: Transmission and Symptoms

- The virus spreads from infected people to others through respiratory droplets, like from a cough or sneeze.
- It is also possible for people to be exposed to the virus by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.
- The following symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure – fever, cough, and shortness of breath.
- Many people with COVID-19 may have little or no symptoms. Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms.
- Most people (about 80%) recover from this disease without needing special treatment. Those who are older and those with other medical problems may be more likely to develop pneumonia or difficulty breathing.
- If you are ill and must visit a health care professional, call ahead or tell them when you arrive that you have a respiratory illness. You may be asked to wear a mask while waiting for or receiving treatment to prevent the spread of the illness.

COVID-19: Prevention and Treatment

- The best prevention for now is hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue and discard the tissue promptly.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick to avoid spreading illness to others.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- There is no specific treatment or vaccine for COVID-19, but studies are underway to find effective treatments and vaccines.



- Antibiotics are not effective for COVID-19, which is caused by a virus. Antibiotics only work against bacteria, not viruses.
- Consult your healthcare provider if you have concerns about your health.

Steps First Nations can take to prepare

- Provide your community members with information from credible sources through existing communication methods.
- Review and update the Pandemic Plan of your Emergency Response Plan, or use the Communicable Disease Emergency Toolkit, which was circulated to all community health directors, to create a plan.
- Make sure all your contact information is correct and everyone is aware of their roles and expectations during a pandemic.
- Review your community's essential supplies and restock if required. Essential supplies may include cleaning supplies and equipment, personal protective equipment, medications, medical supplies and equipment etc.
- Be aware of current public health measures and infection prevention and control measures. If you require information, please check with your public health nurse, health director or contact your local public health unit.
- Educate community members on the steps they can take to protect themselves against respiratory illnesses.
- Advise your community members to avoid large crowds, shopping during peak hours and mass gatherings. A link to the risk-informed decision-making for mass gatherings is included for your reference below in the additional information section.
- Encourage your community not to panic shop, just have enough to manage should the need for a two-week self-isolation arise.
- Encourage your community members to ensure they have their regular medications refilled with a minimum supply of at least two weeks.
- Regularly check trusted sources of information, like the Public Health Agency of Canada and Ministry of Health websites (listed below).

Steps FNIHB Ontario Region are taking to support First Nation leadership, healthcare providers and communities

Health Protection Unit

- The Health Protection Unit (HPU) is working with key federal, provincial, and First Nation public health partners to actively monitor the situation.
- The HPU continues to provide healthcare providers, healthcare facilities, health directors and First Nation communities with up-to-date information including weekly teleconferences, guidelines, screening and assessment tools, and advisories for daycares and schools.
- The HPU continues to provide tools such as signage, frequently asked questions, and toolkits to health facilities.
- The HPU has provided training on COVID-19, the use of appropriate personal protective equipment, and infection prevention and control to nurses, health directors, and health workers.
- The HPU will continue to do all of the above activities, key of which is communication of accurate information about the situation.

- The HPU is available to assist community leadership to respond to specific community questions and needs.

Primary Care Unit

Nursing staffing continues to be monitored and maintained. Supplies and medications are in place with continued replenishment as required. Nurses are being kept up to date regarding public health responses, education, and client screening best practices. Environmental cleaning of the health facilities is a critical public health infection control activity – First Nation employed cleaning and maintenance staff have key roles in controlling spread of infection.

Steps FNIHB will do if there is a case in a First Nation community

First Nation leadership and community healthcare providers can be reassured that the FNIHB HPU, primary care and regional executive will work collaboratively with all partners to provide medical and technical advice. This type of support may include information, response guidance, medical directives, surveillance, training and support for healthcare providers etc. FNIHB will continue to collaborate with municipal, federal, and provincial partners to ensure accurate information is shared at all levels.

Updates and additional information

For current trusted information on novel coronavirus (COVID-19), refer to the following websites, which are regularly maintained and updated.

Public Health Agency of Canada – 2019 novel coronavirus: Outbreak update
Outbreak <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

PHAC - Risk-informed decision-making for mass gatherings during COVID-19 global outbreak <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assesment.html>

Ministry of Health Ontario - <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus>

World Health Organization – Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

Indigenous Services Canada COVID-19 Updates available in several languages –
<https://www.gotoinfo.ca/ISCInfo>

Public Health Guidance for schools (K-12) and childcare programs –
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professional/guidance-schools-childcare-programs.html>

Previous information bulletins and additional information and resources for health staff can be found at Onehealth.ca