

ONTARIO REGION UPDATE



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Important Update: Influenza A

This year's flu season has arrived earlier than usual and [Influenza A](#) (flu) activity in Ontario is very high. Impacts are highest among young children, teens, and adults over 65 years of age. It has been connected to serious illness and deaths in the region. All community members are strongly encouraged to receive the seasonal flu vaccine to prevent severe health outcomes.

Ontario [offers the vaccine to all eligible individuals](#) 6 months of age and older in the province. Despite the potential mismatch between the strains in the vaccine and the strain circulating in the province, getting vaccinated still helps protect from hospitalization. Additional information is available in the Public Health Alert sent to leadership and community programming on December 18, 2025.

Respiratory illness trends are tracked at both the national and provincial levels. For the most recent information about respiratory health and influenza rates in Ontario, please visit the [Ontario Respiratory Virus Tool](#) and for Canada-wide data refer to the [Canadian Respiratory Virus Surveillance Report](#).



Help is Here Whenever You Need It

Support is available 24/7 for all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Please find a list of mental health helplines below that are able to provide culturally relevant support. To find more services and resources, [visit the national Indigenous mental health page](#).



Hope for Wellness Helpline

Phone: [1-855-242-3310](tel:1-855-242-3310)

Online chat: www.hopeforwellness.ca

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Support Line

Phone: [1-844-413-6649](tel:1-844-413-6649)

Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line

Phone: [1-866-925-4419](tel:1-866-925-4419)

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Services

Phone: [9-8-8](tel:9-8-8) (call or text)

Educational Resources: Cannabis & Youth

Free interactive online resources on a wide range of health topics are available for teachers, parents and guardians, and youth on the [Health Canada Experiences](#) website. The site features a variety of content including virtual ambassador and teacher led experiences, worksheets, and interactive games.



Cannabis educational programs include:

- [Get the Facts](#) – (grades 4 to 6) Students learn the risks of using alcohol, cannabis, tobacco and vaping products, as well as helpful tips on how to combat peer pressure.
- [Pursue Your Passion](#) – (grades 7 and 8) Students learn the effects of cannabis use on their brain and mental health. A teacher-led module for Indigenous communities is available in English, French, Cree, Ojibway and Inuktitut.
- [All About Cannabis](#) – (grades 9 to 12) Students learn what cannabis is; its effects on mental health and brain function; addiction and stigma; and healthy habits to cope with mental health challenges.

Additional program topics offered include [opioids](#), [vaping](#), [food safety](#), and [tick prevention and education](#). Visit the [toolkit](#) for free public education resources on: cannabis poisoning in children, cannabis educational programs for youth, and cannabis and mental health.

An infographic titled 'Reduce the spread of infectious diseases' from Health Canada. It shows a step-by-step guide for handwashing: 1. Wet hands, 2. Apply soap, 3. Lather, 4. Rinse, 5. Dry. It also includes a section on 'How to properly wash your hands' with a diagram of a hand and a list of steps. The infographic is dated '2018' and has the 'Canada' logo at the bottom.

Download this resource for your office

CANADA.CA/FLU

Canada

Reduce the Spread of Infectious Diseases



Click on the image, pictured left.
It will take you to a downloadable infographic about reducing the spread of infectious diseases.

Winter Activity Booklet

Check out this handy [winter activity booklet](#) to keep kids entertained over the holiday season. The booklet is printable and includes a word search, land-based scavenger hunt, colouring pages, family conversation starters, and more. For more winter activities, the [Ontario Native Women's Association](#) and the [National Arts Centre](#) also have free colouring book pages available for download.

Prime Minister's Awards 2026

Do you know an outstanding educator or teacher? Honour their impact by nominating them for the [2026 Prime Minister's Award](#). These awards recognize innovative teaching practices and teachers who make a lasting difference in their communities.

Indigenous Services Canada is proud to highlight the essential role of educators in Indigenous communities, recognizing their contributions to education and reconciliation. Anyone can submit a nomination for an educator or teacher who has positively influenced others (please note this excludes nominations from immediate family members of the nominee).

The deadline to submit is January 14, 2026. Nominate an outstanding candidate today!

- [Nominate an early childhood educator](#)
- [Nominate a teacher](#)

Help highlight the contributions of those who make a real difference and celebrate the impact of education on future generations. Please email the awards team for more information: primeministersawards-prixdupremierministre@ised-isde.gc.ca.

New Community Infrastructure Map

The new [Indigenous community infrastructure map](#) is now available, redesigned in collaboration with numerous teams throughout Indigenous Services Canada (ISC). This enhanced tool offers new features and improved performance. It can be used to stay informed with project updates, financial investments, and more. For example, explore ISC-funded infrastructure projects across Canada with ease through features like a new “Featured projects” toggle, which highlights photos and stories about specific projects in First Nations communities on reserves.

Check out the [latest updates and explore the map here](#).

First Nations Guardians Initiatives

On December 17, 2025, Environment and Climate Change Canada announced an investment of over \$4.5 million for 47 First Nations-led Guardians initiatives through the Indigenous Guardians program for 2025–2026. This includes 13 projects in the Ontario region. These initiatives will help protect important ecosystems, build and maintain local economies, and sustain Indigenous ways of life.

Visit the [background page](#) to read more about these projects.

2026 Joint Gathering Wrap-Up



Pictured above: The Honourable Minister Mandy Gull-Masty speaks virtually to Joint Gathering attendees.

On November 25-26, 2025, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) Ontario Region hosted the seventh annual Joint Gathering in Toronto. The event brought together First Nations, federal, and provincial leadership to strengthen relationships and collaborate on the advancement of First Nations priorities.

There were over 500 delegates and exhibitors in attendance, with participation from First Nations Chiefs and Grand Chiefs, leadership from Indigenous Health Organizations and Tribal Councils, as well as 16 federal departments and five provincial ministries.

The agenda included sessions on priority areas for First Nations leadership, including Jordan's Principle, Additions to Reserve, Long-Term Care, Child and Family Services, and Mental Wellness.

Delegates enjoyed cultural elements including drumming from Snye Creek and a water blessing, and heard addresses from key leadership: Ontario Regional Chief Abram Benedict; the Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council; Dr. Valerie Gideon, President, Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario and Deputy Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada; the Honourable Minister George Pirie, Ministry of Northern Economic Development and Growth; and the Honourable Minister Mandy Gull-Masty, Indigenous Services Canada.



Pictured left: Executives from ISC-Ontario Region, Lisa Westaway (Regional Executive) and Michael O'Byrne (Regional Director General), speak to delegates.