

ONTARIO REGION UPDATE



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Blastomycosis Alert

Blastomycosis is a disease that can be fatal if not diagnosed and treated early. In Ontario, 114 people from 34 First Nation communities in Ontario were diagnosed with blastomycosis between 2019 and 2024; 18 of these people died. **The best ways to prevent severe blastomycosis and death are to understand your risk, know the symptoms, get assessed as soon as possible, and receive prompt treatment.**

To support community awareness about blastomycosis, the following text is a brief overview of blastomycosis and available resources for your use.

What is blastomycosis?

- Blastomycosis is a fungal infection that mostly affects the lungs. It is caused by breathing in spores from the fungus *Blastomyces*.
- The spores are invisible and can be released into the air when their environment is disturbed. For example, when camping, digging in the garden, or during construction projects.
- It is not contagious between people, or between people and animals.

Where is *Blastomyces* fungus found?

- *Blastomyces* grows in moist soil, and in damp or rotting organic matter, like fallen wood and leaves.
- It often grows close to bodies of water, and can be found across Ontario.
- It is most commonly found in Northern Ontario, along the Great Lakes, and near the St. Lawrence Seaway.

What are the symptoms of blastomycosis?

- Many people do not develop symptoms and recover on their own.
- For those who do, it can take up to 3 months (sometimes more) for symptoms to show up after inhaling the spores.
- Symptoms range widely, including cough, fever, chest pain, shortness of breath, weight loss, night sweats, chills, and coughing up phlegm or blood.
- Symptoms can include skin lesions, though this is less common.

What do I do if I think I have blastomycosis?

- Blastomycosis can be especially dangerous for people with weakened immune systems or chronic lung conditions.
- If you have any of the symptoms listed above, see a healthcare provider as soon as possible and ask them about blastomycosis if your symptoms:
 - Do not improve after a week, or are getting worse.
 - Do not improve after taking antibiotics or other treatments.
 - Seem to get better with treatment temporarily, but then worsen again.
 - You are unsure of the cause of your symptoms (blastomycosis can look like other common illnesses, such as the flu).
- Tell your healthcare provider if you live or travel in an area the fungus is found, or if your job or hobbies may expose you to the fungus.

Communication resources

Unbranded

- Graphics: Blastomycosis fast facts – [Image 1](#) / [Image 2](#) / [Image 3](#)
- Graphic: Don't let *Blastomyces* keep you inside – [Image](#)
- Infographic: Should I wear a mask? – [Image](#)
- Infographic: Should I be worried about blastomycosis? – [Image](#)



Wildfire Smoke: Creating Spaces with Cleaner Air



Fires in northern Ontario and across the prairies are impacting air quality in many communities. Breathing poor air can have adverse health effects. Limiting your outside time and staying in spaces with cleaner air can reduce smoke exposure and provide relief.

Buildings such as schools, community centres, and band halls have the potential to be cleaner air spaces that limit infiltration of outdoor pollutants. Long-term care and health-care facilities should also be set-up for cleaner air. Individuals may also choose to stay in their homes. In all cases, it's important to limit exposure to wildfire smoke.

Help protect your indoor air quality

- Close windows and doors. Seal any gaps to prevent pollutants from getting in.
- Limit the use of exhaust fans and external vents.
- Wet mop floors and wipe surfaces to reduce settled dust from re-entering the air.
- Avoid vacuuming, which can stir up dust.
- Avoid creating other air pollution (smoking, burning candles, using gas and wood stoves).
- Use portable air purifiers (with HEPA filters) where possible.
- Turn off fresh air intakes on heating ventilation or air conditioning systems and set to recirculation mode.
- Set-up a community building to provide a cleaner air space that is:
 - In good condition with good seals on windows and doors.
 - Has an entryway providing separation from the main area.
 - Has a carbon monoxide alarm, heating ventilation or air conditioning (HVAC) system, and staff to operating it.
 - Has access to potable water, washrooms, and emergency power.

Awareness and communication resources

Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority

- Infographic: Reduce smoke exposure – [Image](#)
- Infographic: Protect the air inside your home – [Image](#)
- Infographic: Protect yourself from wildfire smoke – [Image](#)
- Infographic: Evacuating by road – [Image](#)
- Graphic: Forest fire smoke can be harmful – [Image](#)

Government of Canada

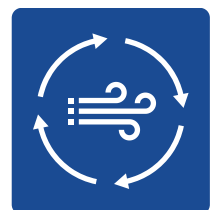
- Fact sheet: Wildfire smoke & your health – [PDF](#)
- Fact sheet: Wildfire smoke with extreme heat – [PDF](#)
- Fact sheet: Using a respirator mask during wildfire smoke events – [PDF](#)
- Interactive map: Fire smoke Canada – [Website](#)
- Index: Ontario air quality health index, Environment Canada – [Website](#)

First Nations Health Authority

- Fact sheet: Wildfire smoke clean air shelters information – [PDF](#)

Government of Northwest Territories

- Fact sheet: Wildfire smoke air quality self-assessment – [PDF](#)



Bite Prevention

[Lyme disease](#) is transmitted to humans by blacklegged ticks (also known as “deer ticks”). [West Nile virus](#) is transmitted to humans by mosquitoes. Both diseases can cause serious health complications, and are passed along to humans when a tick or mosquito bites them.

Preventing tick and mosquito bites is the best way to avoid contracting the diseases. The following information and resources may be helpful in promoting bite prevention this summer and fall. To follow Ontario’s 2025 tracking of tick- and mosquito-related illnesses, visit [Public Health Ontario’s online tool](#).

TICKS

Lyme disease

- Lyme disease is caused by bacteria. Humans can get Lyme disease through the bite of an infected tick.
- Infected blacklegged ticks need to be attached to your body for at least 24 hours to pass on the bacteria that causes Lyme disease.
- You are at a higher risk of infection if you and/or any pets spend time outdoors in and near tick habitats.
- Blacklegged ticks can also pass along other germs to humans.

Life and habitat

- Blacklegged ticks can be active any time of year where the temperature is consistently above 0°C.
- Blacklegged ticks often live in forested areas, tall grasses and weeds, forest brush, and leaf piles.
- Blacklegged ticks are tiny; they can be as small as a poppy seed. It can be hard to spot them if you’re not checking closely.

Prevention

- Do full-body tick checks on yourself, family, and pets after you are finished outside.
- Remove any ticks properly and as soon as possible. Removing attached ticks quickly reduces the chance of infection.
- Shower after returning home from an outside activity. This can help wash off unattached ticks.
- Learn the [symptoms of Lyme disease](#) and other tick-borne illnesses and seek medical attention if you have symptoms, even if you do not find a tick near/on you.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET or Icaridin. Individuals ages 16+ can wear clothing treated with permethrin.
- Wear light coloured, long-sleeved clothing. Ticks are darker in colour, so you can spot them more easily when wearing lighter clothing.
- Wear closed-toes shoes and tuck in your clothing.
- Remove any unnecessary leaf piles, brush, and long grass around your home. Blacklegged ticks often live in these habitats.
- Walk on cleared trails made by humans whenever possible. These paths are often cleared of the habitats where ticks live, like tall grass.

Communication resources

Government of Canada & Province of Ontario

- Activities: Tick resources for educators and children (games, videos, etc.) – [Word document](#)
- Poster: Top 10 tick hiding spots on your body – [Image](#)
 - Ojibwe and Mohawk are also available [here](#).
- Poster: How to protect against tick-borne diseases at work – [Image](#)
- Brochure: Enjoy the outdoors, without a tick – [PDF](#)
- Video: How to properly remove a tick – [YouTube](#)



MOSQUITOES

West Nile virus

- West Nile virus is usually spread through the bite of a mosquito that has fed on an infected bird.
- You cannot get the virus by touching or kissing a person who is infected.
- Anyone can develop a serious West Nile infection, but some people are at a greater risk. This includes adults 50 years or older, people with underlying conditions, and people with weaker immune systems.



Life and habitat

- Mosquitoes grow in standing water.
- Mosquitoes are often most active at dawn and dusk.
- Only female mosquitoes feed on animals and humans. Males feed on pollen and nectar.

Prevention

- Cover exposed skin when you are outside. Wear loose clothing made of tightly woven materials to keep mosquitoes away from your skin. For example, long pants, long sleeves, socks, and a hat.
- Wear light-coloured clothing. Mosquitoes are often drawn to dark colours.
- Use insect repellent when you are outside that contains DEET or Icaridin.
- Reduce mosquito habitats near your home by getting rid of standing water, such as:
 - Tipping fishing boats and gear onto their sides to drain.
 - Cleaning eavestroughs regularly to prevent trapped water.
 - Checking under shrubbery and lawn coverings for pooling water.
 - Drying off water found in items like old tires, tire swings, and children's toys.
 - Turning over outdoor pet dishes, bird baths, and wading pools when not in use, and changing the water at least twice a week.
- Use mosquito netting in outdoor settings, when possible. For example, netting can be used over baby strollers and playpens to protect children playing outside.
- Learn the [symptoms of West Nile virus](#) and see a healthcare provider right away if you develop serious symptoms.
- Natural predators can also provide some control of mosquitoes, as they eat their larvae. This includes fish, frogs, and dragonflies.

Awareness and communication resources

Government of Canada

- Poster: Prevent mosquito-borne diseases at work – [Image](#)
- Text: Pest control tips – [Website](#)
- Text: Prevention of West Nile virus – [Website](#)
- Interactive map: West Nile virus cases in Canada – [Website](#)



Pictured right: A green tarp left outside, collecting pockets of standing water. An example of a habitat mosquitoes can grow in.



Non-Structural Mitigation and Preparedness Program

The [Emergency Management Assistance Program](#) (EMAP) provides funding to First Nations communities so they can build resiliency, prepare for natural hazards and respond to them using the 4 pillars of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

EMAP supports non-structural mitigation and preparedness initiatives through the Non-Structural Mitigation and Preparedness funding stream. This stream is proposal-based and funds non-structural projects undertaken by First Nations communities on reserve to prepare for and mitigate emergencies caused by natural disasters.

The 2025 to 2026 period to submit proposals is now open. Proposals will be reviewed on an ongoing basis until funding is spent. For more information, including [eligibility](#) and [how to apply](#), please visit: [Emergency Management Non-Structural Mitigation and Preparedness program](#).



Wildfire Evacuation

In the event of a possible emergency evacuation, family preparedness is important. If there is an emergency event near your home or community:

- Monitor the emergency through radio, television or local social media accounts for warnings or information about evacuation plans.
- Be prepared to exercise your [emergency plan](#).
- Take your [emergency kit](#) and other essential items with you if an evacuation order is issued or you have to leave your home.
- Follow the routes specified by officials. Don't take shortcuts. They could lead you to a blocked or dangerous area.

For First Nations or Inuit who are evacuated, here are a list of [supports available](#) to you. [After you have evacuated](#), you should follow evacuation orders and stay outside the evacuation zone. For more information, please visit www.canada.ca/indigenousevacuations.



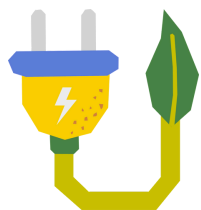
New Bill: Remaining Inequities in the *Indian Act*

On May 29, 2025, Minister Many Gull-Masty [announced the introduction of Bill S-2](#) in the Senate. The Act addresses some of the remaining inequities in registration and band membership provisions of the Indian Act. Bill S-2 replaces former Bill C-38, which did not receive Royal Assent before Parliament was dissolved in March 2025.

Bill S-2 proposes amendments in four key areas: enfranchisement, voluntary deregistration, natal band reaffiliation and membership, and the removal of outdated and offensive language related to dependent persons. If passed, the legislation would ensure that individuals with family histories of enfranchisement are entitled to registration under the Indian Act and extend entitlement to their descendants. For more information, please visit the [backgrounder](#) and [news release](#).

Green Jobs for Youth

The Government of Canada [announced new funding](#) to create employment and skills training opportunities for youth in natural resources sectors. This includes energy, forestry, mining, earth sciences and clean technology. Through the [Science and Technology Internship Program \(STIP\) – Green Jobs](#), employers in natural resources sectors can apply for funding to hire, train and mentor youth aged 15 to 30 for up to 12 months.



STIP – Green Jobs is part of the [Youth Employment and Skills Strategy](#), which supports youth in gaining the hands-on skills and experience they need to effectively transition into the labour market. Visit Natural Resources Canada's [STIP – Green Jobs](#) page to find out how to apply to be an employer or an intern.

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

Online chat: www.hopeforwellness.ca

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Support Line

Phone: 1-844-413-6649

Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line

Phone: 1-866-925-4419

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Services

Phone: 9-8-8 (call or text)



National Indigenous History Month

June marks National Indigenous History Month. It is a yearly reminder of a daily truth; Indigenous histories are not a singular story from the past. They did not begin or end with the creation of Canada. They are also not limited to tragedy, as they are made up of countless experiences, spanning thousands of years.

This National Indigenous History Month, we are highlighting an important way Indigenous histories are cared for and passed on— through Indigenous languages. Indigenous languages have always been on these lands, connecting innumerable stories and histories. They are vital tools, with each word conveying cultural memories and knowledge.

Despite this, Indigenous languages have not received equitable support or recognition. The loss of Indigenous language speakers in Canada and around the world has grown dire enough that the United Nations declared 2022 to 2032 as the “[International Decade of Indigenous Languages](#)”. The aim is to draw attention, mobilize revitalization and restoration efforts, and preserve existing languages as much as possible for the generations to come.

None of this is news to Indigenous peoples, let alone teachers and Elders, who often lead language revitalization and preservation. Their work is evident in numerous resources that can be accessed online. In recognition of their efforts, the following resources may be helpful tools and reference materials for educators, language gatherers, and other language leaders, both in and out of the classroom.

- Ontario Ministry of Education – [Native languages resource guide: Ojibwe and Cree](#)
- Ontario Ministry of Education – [Native languages resource guide: Oneida, Cayuga, and Mohawk](#)
- Translation Bureau – [Indigenous languages, learning and teaching resources](#)
- Natural Resources Canada – [Stories from the land](#)
- University of British Columbia – [Indigitization toolkit](#)
- First Voices – [Language Gathering and Collection Guide](#)
- Statistics Canada – [Indigenous languages across Canada](#)
- Library and Archives Canada – [We are here: sharing stories](#)
- Downie & Wenjack Fund – [13 moons calendar resources](#)
- Canadian Geographica – [Mapping Indigenous languages in Canada](#)



National Indigenous Peoples Day

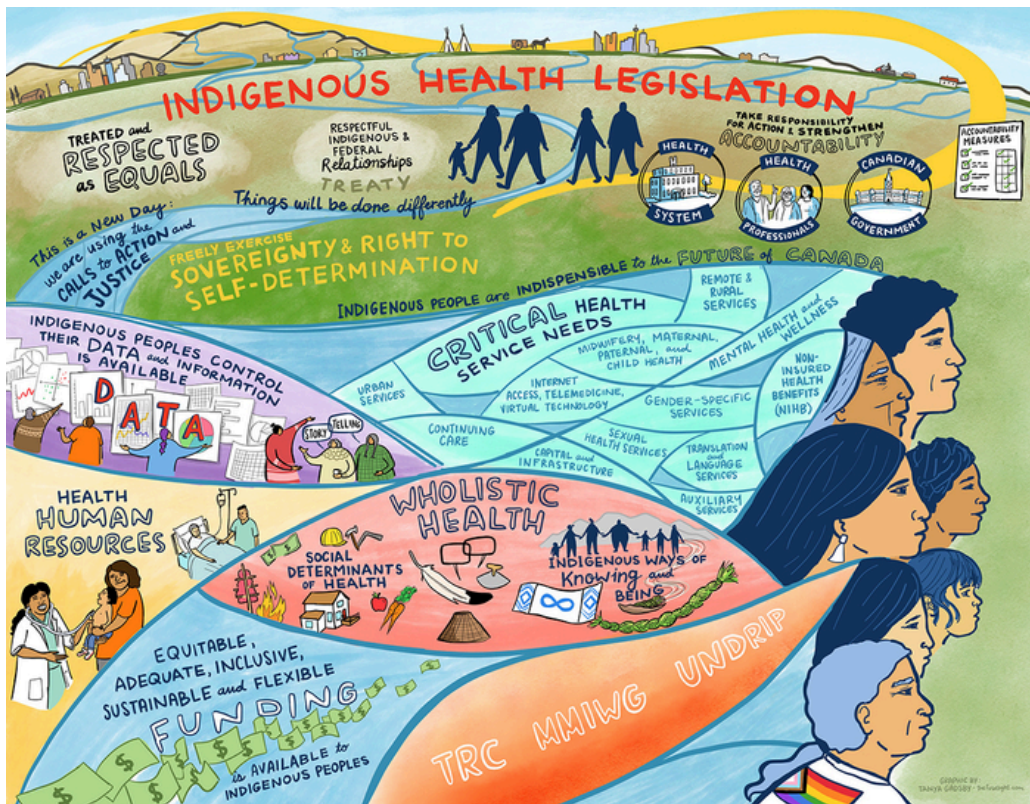
The official “National Indigenous Peoples” Day was first created in 1996, but the celebration of Indigenous cultures, languages, contributions, and traditions during summer solstice is a practice many millennia old. Each June 21 gives us the opportunity to reflect on and commemorate this practice.

In addition to celebrations, National Indigenous Peoples Day serves as a reminder to reflect on the importance of Indigenous cultures and the responsibility we have to act on reconciliation every day. This June in particular marks the importance of consistent reflection with action, and what happens when we fall short of that.

June 2025 marks ten years since the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#) (TRC) held their closing event and delivered their executive summary. Over the last decade, there have been some advancements towards answering these calls. However, many of the [calls to action](#) have not been answered to the satisfaction of the Indigenous communities impacted. This is an issue that affects everyone. It limits our ability to achieve true equity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants of these lands.

Each year, we speak to the importance of these calls as public servants. Over the next 365 days, we aim to do more than just speak about them. There are steps ISC employees can take to answer these calls and are required to take as part of their respective roles. This includes professional development and training that is required of all public servants (TRC action #57), and improving Indigenous representation in health fields for those part of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (TRC action #23).

It is our responsibility as treaty peoples and human beings to work towards a future where each of these calls are answered to the best of our abilities.



Pictured left: A graphic by Tanya Gadsby. The graphic is their artistic summary of the input the Government of Canada received from First Nation, Inuit, Métis, and Intersectional Partners on Indigenous Health Legislation.

It is part of the executive summary for “[Visions for Distinctions-based Indigenous Health Legislation](#)”, released in fall 2022.

Read the full [description of the image online](#).