

ONTARIO REGION UPDATE



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ontario-communications@sac-isc.gc.ca





Communicating About Respiratory Illness Season

You can get sick at any time of the year, but there tends to be more cases of respiratory illnesses in the fall and winter. The [same protection methods](#) that have helped us get through past respiratory illness seasons will help us this year. Everyone is encouraged to use multiple [personal protective measures](#); stay home when they are sick; masking as needed; and making sure they are up to date with all recommended immunizations.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has developed an updated **Respiratory Illness Communications Toolkit**, that is designed to support your outreach efforts and help promote key public health messages.

[Click here to download the toolkit](#). It includes:

- Key messages
- Social media messages and sharable images
- Awareness resources
- Vaccination guides



This toolkit includes ready-to-use content that can be repurposed, reposted, or customized to suit your audience. It highlights the importance of personal protective measures and timely vaccination to help reduce the spread of respiratory illness and ease pressure on our health care systems.



Other communication resources

[Immunize Canada](#) creates great resources about respiratory illnesses. The [OneHealth Portal](#) also hosts a collection of resources. Visit each website to find a variety of products related to respiratory illness season. A few key examples from both are highlighted below.

- Fact sheet: Respiratory illness facts – [PDF](#)
- Graphic set: What is RSV? – [ZIP file](#) (automatic download)
- Infographic: Influenza prevention in people with asthma – [PDF](#)
- Infographic: Myth-busting Mondays, 2 in 1 shot – [Image file](#)

Seasonal immunizations (Ontario)

Ontario has launched its [fall immunization programs](#) for 2025. Both the National Advisory Committee on Immunization and the provincial Ministry of Health recommend giving immunization priority to specific populations this fall, which includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis individuals. These groups may experience various risk factors and/or face barriers in accessing healthcare.

Here is a summary of key recommendations that apply to Indigenous individuals. Please speak with a local health care provider, nursing station, or public health unit for personal health guidance.

Influenza (flu) and COVID-19

It is recommended that the following priority populations receive their fall flu and COVID-19 immunizations as soon as possible:

- People in or from First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities

It is also recommended that **the following individuals receive an additional COVID-19 dose in Spring 2026:**

- Adults 55 years and older who identify as First Nations, Inuit or Métis, *and* their non-Indigenous household members who are 55 years and older
- Adults living in long-term care homes and other congregate living settings, such as Elder Care Lodges
- Individuals 6 months of age and older who are [moderately to severely immunocompromised](#) (due to an underlying condition or treatment)

For more information about flu immunization, please visit ontario.ca/page/flu-facts.

For more information about COVID-19 immunization, visit: ontario.ca/page/covid-19-vaccines.

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

RSV is a major cause of respiratory illness, particularly among infants, young children, and older adults. Ontario offers immunization to these vulnerable groups, who are at a higher risk of serious infection. This includes infants; high-risk children; and First Nations, Inuit and Métis individuals 60 years of age and older.

People should speak with a health care provider for personalised immunization advice. For more information about RSV immunization and eligibility, visit: ontario.ca/page/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-prevention-programs.

Staying Safe on the Land

The fall hunting season is underway in the regions. Wild game provides a major source of vitamin A, C, calcium, iron and protein, and is beneficial to health. However, wild game can be contaminated. It is especially important to stay informed about public health concerns like rabies and avian flu if you are someone who is more likely to come into close contact with wildlife – such as hunters, trappers, and fishers. The following resources may be helpful for tracking local concerns and promoting safety on the land this fall and winter.

Communication resources

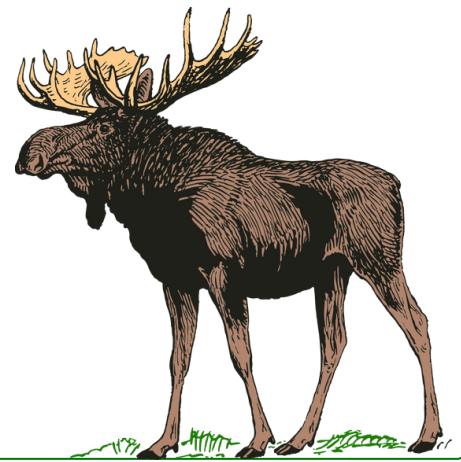
Government of Canada & Government of Ontario

- Hotline: Ontario rabies information line for non-emergencies – [1\(888\) 574-6656](tel:18885746656)
- Fact sheet: Chronic wasting disease and traditional food – [PDF](#) (auto-download)
- Webpage: Monitoring and testing chronic wasting disease – [Link](#)
- Webpage: Food safety for hunting – [Link](#)

Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative (Ontario Regional Centre)

- Hotline: Reporting sick or dead animals – [1\(866\) 673-4781](tel:18666734781)
- Online tool: Reporting sick animals online – [Link](#)
- Dashboard: Avian influenza in wildlife – [Link](#)
- Poster: Prevent the spread of avian influenza – [PDF](#)

** Please note the centre takes reports on a variety of suspected illnesses and species, including bats, deer, and birds.*



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:18552423310)

Online chat: www.hopeforwellness.ca

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Support Line

Phone: [1-844-413-6649](tel:18444136649)

Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line

Phone: [1-866-925-4419](tel:18669254419)

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Services

Phone: [9-8-8](tel:9088) (call or text)



Entrepreneurship Funding

The Access to Business Opportunities program is accepting funding applications for the 2026 to 2027 fiscal year. The program offers non-repayable contributions to national and regional projects, similar to grants. Successful projects will promote a culture of entrepreneurship, improve access to business opportunities, and strengthen the capacity of other Indigenous business. The program does not fund individual businesses.

The program is open to First Nation and Inuit communities, as well as Indigenous-owned organizations and associations. Applicants are to submit a project pitch by e-mail to APA-ABO@sac-isc.gc.ca. If the pitched project aligns with the program's terms and conditions, the applicants will be invited to submit an application.

The deadline to apply is October 31, 2025 at 11:59pm, Eastern Time. Visit the Access to Business Opportunities [webpage](#) for more information.

Sport & Social Development

The Indigenous Sport Unit delivers the Sport for Social Development in Indigenous Communities (SSDIC). SSDIC provides multiple streams funding to support Indigenous efforts to stay active in community, and connects participants with culturally relevant physical activity. Stream Three is currently accepting applications for projects that meet the needs and priorities of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ peoples.

Eligible projects will provide opportunities for these groups to participate in meaningful sport, recreational, and physical activities, while also supporting one or more social development goals. Stream Three's social development goals focus on:

- physical and mental health
- suicide prevention
- sexual trafficking awareness and prevention
- safe and healthy relationships
- sexual positivity (2SLGBTQI+)

This SSDIC stream is open to recognized First Nations, Inuit communities, and Metis Nations. It also open to non-profit organizations that are Indigenous-owned and/or operated, and primarily serves Indigenous women, girls, and/or 2SLGBTQI+ peoples.

The deadline to apply is October 6, 2025 at 4:00pm, Eastern Time. Please email the program to request an application form: sportcanada.ssdsca-ssdic.sportcanada@pch.gc.ca. Visit the [webpage](#) for more information.



2025 Joint Gathering

An updated message from the event organizers:



Indigenous Services Canada, Ontario Region is pleased to invite First Nations leadership from across Ontario to the seventh annual Joint Gathering. It will be held on November 25 and 26, 2025, at the Sheraton Toronto Airport Hotel and Conference Centre.

Our theme for the 2025 Joint Gathering is *Reaffirming Shared Priorities in a Changing Landscape*. We hope that you will join us to explore how federal, provincial, and First Nations partners can navigate change through collaboration and shared vision.

Please register for the Joint Gathering using [this link](#).

- **To stay on-site at the Sheraton Toronto Airport Hotel**, [click here](#) to book your room online or call 1-866-932-7058. Reference "Joint Gathering 2025" **by 5:00pm on November 10, 2025 to receive a preferred booking rate.**
- ISC will sponsor travel for First Nation Chiefs, Grand Chiefs, Deputy Grand Chiefs and Executive Directors of Tribal Councils and Health Authorities. Sponsorship is also extended to select delegates by invitation.

We look forward to meeting with you in November!



Pictured above: ISC-Region executives Michael O'Byrne (left) and Lisa Westaway (right) speaking at a previous Joint Gathering. Photo from Southern First Nations Secretariat.

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

In September, we observe both Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. These days of observation are understandably heavy and loaded for many Survivors and Indigenous people, who still wait for the truth and justice that are required for reconciliation. With respect to the complexities of these days, we affirm our daily accountability to the Indigenous peoples who have stewarded these lands since time immemorial, and to whom our regional office services. We also reaffirm our commitment to participate in tangible change that works towards reconciliation, not just symbolic acts.



Pictured above: The northern lights passing over Kenora in Treaty 3 territory.