

# Novel coronavirus (COVID-19):

## Weekly Bulletin to First Nations in Alberta: March 13, 2020

Office of the Senior Medical Officer of Health

Please email questions about COVID-19 to: [sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca](mailto:sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca)

The World Health Organization officially declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. The declaration of a pandemic reflects the seriousness of the COVID-19 virus, which, as seen in other parts of the world is more severe than seasonal influenza and more contagious than a virus like SARS. COVID-19 can be contained by everyone working together to minimize risk and keep all Albertans safe. Alberta is prepared to respond to this public health emergency. Moving forward, it will be important for everyone to continue preparing for the potential for our risk in Alberta to change.

All cases to date in Alberta are travel-related. Anyone considered to be at risk is being directly contacted by Alberta Health Services (AHS). It is important to know that if an individual is not contacted by AHS, they are not at risk at this time. COVID-19 is changing rapidly and it will be important to share and reinforce messaging for steps individuals, families, and communities can take to protect their health. There is a lot of information in the media on COVID-19 and it is very important that everyone works to stop the spread of rumours that can lead to panic. The risk of exposure to the virus is currently low in Alberta.

### Status Update

Number of cases reported\*, as of March 13, 2020:

*\*numbers are changing rapidly and may change after this bulletin is released*

	Alberta (Alberta Health)	Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada)	Globally (World Health Organization)
Cases	26	157	125,048
Deaths	0	1	4,613

- There are twenty-six confirmed COVID-19 cases in Alberta. All individuals have been isolated to prevent further transmission.
- **The current risk level to Albertans is still assessed as low however this risk may increase in the coming weeks.** The province determines the risk level by assessing how likely Albertans are to be exposed to COVID-19. If this changes, the risk level in Alberta will be updated accordingly.
- Based on evolving information, Alberta is taking precautions to limit risk and protect the health of all Albertans. Alberta has increased its lab capacity for testing for COVID-19. Additionally, testing has expanded to include all symptomatic individuals who have travelled outside of Canada during the 14 day period before their illness began.

### Current Public Health Actions

Alberta's public health officials continue to confirm cases of COVID-19 in Alberta and have implemented all necessary precautions to prevent the infection from spreading. They are:

- Working closely with federal and provincial partners to share information and assess potential health risks.



- Ensuring our health system is ready to respond effectively if needed.
- Ensuring front-line health professionals have information about the virus so they can take recommended actions and promptly report suspected cases to public health officials.
- Updating self-isolation and self-monitoring recommendations for returning travellers experiencing symptoms, as required.
- Tracing all close contacts of presumptive and confirmed cases, testing and isolating those who are symptomatic, and asking even those who are well to self-isolate for 14 days after their last contact with the case.

### **What FNIHB is doing**

- As with any other communicable disease on-reserve in Alberta, FNIHB-AB is providing public health case and contact management for any arising, confirmed, or probable COVID-19 cases in a community.
- FNIHB-AB is in the process of securing a liaison, specifically for Chiefs, to support information sharing and navigation of questions or concerns related to COVID-19. This is an interim approach to increase and enhance the already established communication pathways in place between Indigenous Services Canada and First Nations communities in Alberta.
- FNIHB-AB has launched a series of TeleHealth sessions for First Nations in Alberta focused on sharing information about COVID-19, responding to questions from communities and sharing information on specific priority areas. **The next telehealth session will be held on Thursday March 19, 2020** and will focus on “Facility Readiness in First Nations Communities (e.g. Health Centers, Long-Term Care/Elder’s Lodge, Schools, Child Care facilities). Information on how to register will be sent shortly. Two previous telehealth sessions were recorded and are available on the Onehealth.ca website.
- FNIHB-AB has developed a general COVID-19 presentation that has been distributed to Health Directors and Directors of Emergency Management. Health centre staff/DEMs can use this tool to deliver presentations to community members.
- In-person, train-the trainer, Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) and PPE sessions have been conducted in six locations throughout the province. Nurses who attended the training can train others in the community.
- FNIHB-AB is developing a Communicable Disease Emergency (CDE) Plan template/toolkit to support Nations in preparing for communicable disease emergencies, including COVID-19. The CDE template plan will be distributed to First Nations in Alberta shortly.
- **FNIHB-AB is working with provincial and federal partners to ensure that First Nations have access to PPE supplies for health services.**
- FNIHB-AB, in collaboration with AEMA First Nations Field Officers, are supporting First Nation communities in pandemic planning.

### **Information about Travel**

Based on the ongoing developments outside Alberta, both in the actions being taken by other jurisdictions, as well as the increasing spread of cases around the world Alberta Health has made the following recommendations:

- Travelers who **returned before March 12**
  - Travelers returning from China’s Hubei province, Iran, Italy or the Grand Princess Cruise, should self-isolate for 14 days, even if they are feeling well.
  - Travelers returning from outside Canada who are not returning from these aforementioned places do not need to self-isolate; however, they should monitor for symptoms for 14 days.
- Travelers who **returned on or after March 12**
  - Any traveler returning from outside Canada who returns March 12 or later, should self-isolate for 14 days, even if feeling well, and monitor for symptoms
- Alberta Health recommends that Albertans **DO NOT** travel outside of Canada at this time.
- The following are recommendations for travelers who are self-isolating:

- Avoid close contact with other people, especially those with chronic conditions, a compromised immune system, or seniors
- Do not attend work, school, social events or any other public gatherings
- Monitor for symptoms like fever, cough or shortness of breath in themselves or family members
  - Call [Health Link 811](#) at the first sign of symptoms. Call from home before going to a health care facility, unless severely ill.
  - If severely ill and in need of immediate medical attention call 911 and inform them that you may have COVID-19.
- If you are unsure if you should be self-isolating or you have questions about how to do it call [Health Link 811](#)
- [Health Link 811](#) is a telephone service, which provides free 24/7 nurse advice and general health information for Albertans. Health Link 811 currently has high wait times due to the high volume of individuals seeking advice on COVID-19. Alberta Health Services is currently working to expand the capacity of Health Link 811.

### ***Mass Gatherings***

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, Alberta has implemented new public health restrictions.

#### **Events**

The following events should be cancelled:

- Events with more than 250 attendees.
  - This includes large sporting events, conferences and community events.
  - It does not include places of worship, grocery stores, airports or shopping centres
- Events with more than 50 attendees and expects to have international participants, or involves critical infrastructure staff, seniors, or other high-risk populations.

Events that do not meet these criteria can proceed, but risk mitigation must be in place, such as sanitizer stations and distancing between attendees.

- **Schools and daycares**
  - Schools and daycares can remain open at this time, but steps should be taken to ensure no more than 250 people are in the same room at any given time.
- If you have specific questions about an upcoming gathering, please email your questions to: [sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca](mailto:sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca)
- For more information on risk considerations when deciding whether to postpone or cancel a mass gathering, please visit the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) recommendations on conducting a risk assessment <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assesment.html>

### ***Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Health Centre Staff and Patients***

- If communities are unable to access routine supplies (procedure/surgical masks, gowns, face shields gloves, etc.) due to supplier shortages, please email [sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca](mailto:sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca)

### ***Actions individuals and families can take***

To help protect against all respiratory illnesses, including the flu and COVID-19, you should:

- Wash your hands often and well.
- Avoid touching your face, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched.

- Stay at home and away from others if you are feeling ill.
- When sick, cover your cough and sneezes and then wash your hands.

### ***Actions First Nation communities are encouraged to take***

- Update and inform your community members of the evolving situation through existing community communication channels.
- Review and update the pandemic annex of your All-Hazards Emergency Response Plan.
- Be aware of current public health infection prevention and control measures.
- Educate community members on the steps they can take to protect themselves against respiratory illnesses (below).
- Regularly check trusted sources of information, like the Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services links provided in this bulletin.

### ***COVID-19: Symptoms and Transmission***

- Symptoms for COVID-19 are similar to those for influenza or other respiratory illnesses. The most common symptoms include fever, cough, and feeling extremely tired.
- While COVID-19 can cause serious illness, many patients have reported only mild symptoms.
- Most people (about 80%) recover from this disease without requiring special treatment. Those who are older, and those with other medical problems are more at risk of severe illness.
- There is evidence of **person-to-person spread**. At this time, it appears the virus is transmitted by larger droplets, like from a cough or sneeze. It is also possible for people to be exposed to the virus if they are in direct contact with someone who is sick with COVID-19 or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. There is no evidence that it's capable of being transmitted by products imported from affected countries.

### ***COVID-19: Prevention and Treatment***

- At the current time, there is no available vaccine for COVID-19.
- Although there are no specific medications for COVID-19 at this time, the Alberta health care system is able to provide effective care for people who develop a serious COVID-19 illness.
- Consult [Health Link 811](#) for advice if you're:
  - Concerned about your health, or
  - Feeling ill and recently returned from outside of Canada

### ***Wearing Medical Masks***

- If you are healthy, medical masks are not recommended.
- When sick, wearing a mask helps prevent illnesses from being passed on to other people. This is why people who have a cough or respiratory symptoms are asked to wear a mask and wash their hands when visiting the clinic.

### ***Frequently Asked Questions***

#### **Should I be worried about COVID-19?**

- FNIHB, AHS and Alberta Health are prepared for COVID-19 response in the province.
- We are carefully monitoring the situation and have taken the necessary steps to find cases and prevent the ongoing spread of the virus.

#### **What does self-isolation mean?**

- Self-isolation does not mean a person has COVID-19. Self-isolation is used to lower the chance of spreading the illness to other people.
- Self-isolation means avoiding situations where you could infect other people if you have or are at increased risk of COVID-19 infection. This means all situations where you may come in contact with others, such as social gatherings, work, school, child care, athletic events, university, faith-based

gatherings, healthcare facilities, grocery stores, restaurants, shopping malls, and all public gatherings.

- You should, (where possible) not use public transportation including buses, taxis, or ride sharing.
- As much as possible, you should limit contact with people other than the family members/companions who you travelled with.
- You should avoid having visitors to your home, but it is okay for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food.
- You can also use delivery or pick up services for errands such as grocery shopping.
- Avoid sharing household items such as dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, pillows, or other items with other people in your home. After using these items, you should wash them thoroughly with soap and water, place in the dishwasher for cleaning, or wash in the washing machine.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water and regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched and shared surfaces such as doorknobs and counters.
- If you need to leave your home for an urgent errand, such as picking up essential medication, as a precaution to reduce risk of spread, you should wear a surgical mask while you are out.
- During this time, it is important that you monitor your health for symptoms like fever or cough, and call Health Link 811 if you have any concerns.

### ***Updates and additional information***

If you have general questions about COVID-19 or require current information, please refer to the following websites which are trusted information sources and are being regularly maintained and updated.

**Alberta Health** – [Coronavirus info for Albertans](https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx)  
<https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx>

**Alberta Health Services** – [novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx)  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx>

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

**World Health Organization** – [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) outbreak](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019)  
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

**Indigenous Services Canada COVID-19 Updates available in several languages -**  
<https://www.gotoinfo.ca/ISCInfo>  
<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1581964230816/1581964277298>

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

**Johns Hopkins University Interactive Dashboard –**  
<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

Previous information bulletins and additional information and resources for health staff can be found at [OneHealth.ca](https://www.onehealth.ca)

**Anyone with specific questions or concerns about their health is encouraged to call Health Link at 811 for assessment and health advice.**

Should you have questions about COVID-19, please do not hesitate to email:  
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