Novel coronavirus (COVID-19):

Weekly Bulletin to First Nations in Alberta: March 26, 2020

Office of the Senior Medical Officer of Health

Please email questions about COVID-19 to: sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca

The COVID-19 outbreak was declared a global pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO). On March 17 the Alberta government declared a state of public health emergency, empowering authorities under the Public Health Act to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Status Update

Number of cases reported*, **as of March 26, 2020**:

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

	Alberta (Alberta Health)	**Canada** (Public Health Agency of Canada)
Cases	**419**	**3,385**
Deaths	**2**	**27**

- There are identified cases of COVID-19 in all Alberta Health zones: Calgary zone (**250**); Edmonton zone (**100**); Central zone (**35**); South zone (**10**); North zone (**23**) and Unknown (**1**).
- Aggregate data on COVID-19 cases and laboratory testing in Alberta is now available at https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-alberta-data.aspx. This includes age range, sex, geographical area and AHS zone of cases.

Symptoms and Risks

- Symptoms for COVID-19 are similar to those for influenza or other respiratory illnesses. The most common symptoms include cough, fever, runny nose, sore throat or shortness of breath. You are **legally required to self-isolate for 10 days** if you have any of these symptoms that is not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition.
- COVID-19 can cause serious respiratory illness. Because it is a new virus with no treatment or immunity in people, it is critical for people with any symptoms to stay home and self-isolate to keep it from spreading.
- If you have symptoms **do not** go to an ER or clinic. If severely ill and in need of immediate medical attention call 911 and inform them that you may have COVID-19.
- Most people – about 80% – recover without needing special treatment. While we are still learning about COVID-19, serious illness appears to develop more often in people who are older or have pre-existing conditions, such as: high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes.

Testing in Alberta

- Alberta's testing approach for COVID-19 is changing. The new approach for testing prioritizes at-risk populations and those at the highest risk of exposure. Testing will be prioritized for the following individuals, if they are symptomatic:
  - People who are hospitalized with respiratory illness.
  - Residents of continuing care and other similar facilities.
  - People who returned from travelling abroad between March 8 and March 12 (before the self-isolation protocols were in place).
  - Health-care workers with respiratory symptoms.

- Anyone with symptoms who does not fit any of the above categories is asked to stay home and self-isolate for a minimum of 10 days from the start of their symptoms, or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.
- Anyone who has already been told by Health Link that they will be tested will still get tested.

Current Public Health Actions
- The Government of Canada has closed the borders to non-essential travel.
- Alberta has implemented measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, including new mandatory self-isolation requirements and mass gathering restrictions.
- Law enforcement agencies have been granted full authority to enforce public health orders and issue fines for violations.
    - Fines administered through tickets for violating an order have increased from up to $100 per day to a prescribed fine of $1,000 per occurrence.
    - Courts will have increased powers to administer fines of up to $100,000 for a first offence and up to $500,000 for a subsequent offence for more serious violations.
- Public health orders subject to fines for violation include:
    - Any individual who has travelled outside of Canada must go into **mandatory quarantine for 14 days from their return, plus an additional 10 days from the onset of any symptoms should they occur**, whichever is longer.
    - Any individual who exhibits COVID-19 symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition must go into **mandatory self-isolation for a minimum of 10 days** from the start of their symptoms, or until the symptoms resolve, whichever is longer. Symptoms include cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose, or a sore throat.
    - Any individual who has been identified by as a close contact of a person(s) with COVID-19 must go into **mandatory quarantine for 14 days** from the date of last having been exposed to COVID-19, plus an additional 10 days from the onset of any symptoms should they occur, whichever is longer.
    - Mass gatherings **must be limited** to no more than 50 attendees.
    - Access to public recreational facilities, private entertainment facilities, bars and nightclubs **is prohibited**.
    - Visitation to long-term care and other continuing care facilities **is limited to essential visitors only.**
- Exemptions will continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis by public health officials.

What the Government of Canada and ISC/FNIHB-AB is doing
- The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) offers income support for up to 16 weeks to those who lose pay due to the pandemic. It is available to wage earners, contract workers, and self-employed people who do not qualify for employment insurance (EI). The application process is scheduled to open in early April. Income support payments can amount to roughly $2,000 a month, and are expected to flow 10 days after filling out the application. The benefits will be available for four months. More information is available here: https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2020/03/introduces-canada-emergency-response-benefit-to-help-workers-and-businesses.html
- Other supports offered through the federal government include the emergency care benefit and a GST rebate increase for low and modest income Canadians. More information on these programs is available here https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-supports-for-albertans.aspx
- Indigenous Services Canada Alberta (ISC- AB) through the Emergency Management Assistance Program and Health Emergency Management program has begun providing each First Nation in Alberta with initial funding allocations to support immediate emergency management and planning needs.
- The province of Alberta is also working to support employers and employees and more information on what is offered can be found here https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-support-for-employers.aspx
- ISC-AB is working with communities to review pandemic plans. Specific outreach is underway with

Nations to:
- o Identify their strategy to support isolation measures should a case be identified, and any additional supports needed to implement these strategies.
- o Remote and isolated communities are scheduled to receive additional support for isolation measures.
- o Ensure appropriate PPE is available and supporting requests for testing in communities in collaboration with FNIHB national offices and AHS zones.
- All previous telehealth sessions were recorded and are available at http://www.fntn.ca. **The next telehealth session will be held on Thursday April 2, 2020** and will focus on **'Covid-19 Updates'.** Information on how to register will be sent shortly**.**
- ISC-AB is formalizing weekly outreach to Chiefs, with provincial partners included, and an information resource to Chiefs is being sent daily.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Health Centre Staff and Patients
- Numerous communities have received supplies for healthcare workers. Shipments will continue to be sent directly to the communities from national office.
- To avoid duplication and ensure PPE is distributed efficiently on an as needed basis we ask that you please work directly with your Nation's nursing team to confirm the appropriate PPE request form has been completed and returned to ISC-AB.
- If communities are unable to access PPE supplies (procedure/surgical masks, gowns, face shields gloves, etc.) please email **sac.cdemergenciesab- urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca**
- To ensure rational usage, PPE should be used by health care workers involved in the direct care of patients.

Use of Masks
- If you are sick, wearing a mask helps prevent passing the illness on to other people.
- If you do not have any respiratory symptoms such as fever, cough or runny nose, you do not need to wear a mask.
- For healthy people, wear a mask **only if you are taking care of a person with suspected COVID-19 infection.**
- Masks are effective only when used **in combination with frequent hand cleaning** with alcohol based hand rub or soap and water. When used alone, masks can give a false feeling of protection and can even be a source of infection when not used correctly.
- If you wear a mask, then you **must know how to use and dispose of it properly.**

Information about Travel
- Effective March 25, the Government of Canada has implemented a **mandatory 14-day quarantine**, under the Quarantine Act, for travelers returning to Canada They must monitor for symptoms: cough, fever, shortness of breath, nasal congestion, or sore throat.
- o If you become sick during this time, you **must self-isolate for at least 10 additional days** from all other members of your household from the beginning of symptoms or until you are feeling well, whichever takes longer.
- Albertans are **NOT recommended** to travel outside of the country at this time.
- As more airlines confirm passengers with COVID-19, Albertans are advised to check with their airlines for information about potential cases **even if travel was within Canada**. Flights that have confirmed cases of COVID-19 and the affected seats will be posted online as information is confirmed. If you recently returned from a flight:
- o Please visit https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-flight-information.pdf to check the list of flights with confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- o **Passengers in affected seats from domestic flights are considered close contacts and are at risk of exposure. You are legally required to self-isolate for 14 days and monitor for symptoms**.

Mass Gatherings

Alberta implemented a **public health order** restricting mass gatherings to protect Albertans' health and limit the spread of COVID-19.

- Gatherings with more than 50 people are **not allowed**, including large sporting events, conferences and community events, as well as worship gatherings and family events – including weddings and funerals (wakes).
  - o This does not include: grocery stores, shopping centres, health care facilities, airports, the legislature and other essential services.
  - o Not-for-profit community kitchens, soup kitchens and religious kitchens are exempt at this time, but risk mitigation strategies must be followed.
- Gatherings with fewer than 50 people **should be cancelled** if the event:
  - o Includes any attendees travelling from outside of Canada.
  - o Has, as its focus, attendees that are members of critical infrastructure or critical service roles (e.g. healthcare workers, first responders, electric/power workers, telecommunications).
  - o Includes attendees from demographic groups at greater risk of severe disease, such as people 60 years of age or older and individuals with chronic medical conditions.
  - o Has attendees participating in activities that promote disease transmission (e.g. singing, cheering, close contact, sharing food or beverages, buffet style meals).
  - o Is in a space that does not allow for recommended social distancing (at least 6 feet between attendees).
- All gatherings that are proceeding because they don't meet the restriction criteria, including weddings and funerals with less than 50 people, should follow the general risk mitigation strategies found here https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-mass-gatherings-fact-sheet.pdf
- **Violation of the public health order on mandatory mass gathering restrictions is subject to a fine.**

Daycare

- Select licensed child care centres will begin reopening to provide child care for core service workers.
  - o Access will be prioritized to health care practitioners and critical infrastructure workers.
  - o Additional space will then be available to first responders and others.
  - o Children's Services will contact the centres that will be reopening directly.
  - o Parents will be notified by their employer if they qualify to send their children to newly re-opened centres.

Mandatory Information for visiting Continuing care, long-term care and seniors lodges

Individuals over 60 years of age and those with pre-existing health conditions are most at risk of severe symptoms from COVID-19. To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, among seniors and other vulnerable groups:

- Visitors to any continuing care, long-term care and senior's lodges in Alberta are limited to only a single essential visitor designated by the resident or guardian (or other alternate decision-maker). The designated essential visitor cannot be under 18 years of age.
- Each essential visitor must be verified and undergo a health screening prior to entering the facility. This may include a temperature check or a questionnaire.
- Facilities must have security staff or a greeter to conduct this screening and verify the visitor is designated.
- Exceptions to these essential visitor rules will be made for family members to visit a person who is dying, so long as only one visitor enters the facility at a time.
- This also applies to licensed facilities for persons with disabilities.

What communities can do

- Update and inform your community members of the evolving situation through existing community communication channels.
- Educate community members on the steps they can take to protect themselves against respiratory illnesses.
- Regularly check trusted sources of information, like the Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services links provided in this bulletin.
- **Food insecurity**, a serious issue during normal circumstances is impacted further during times of crisis. If your community is looking for ideas and planning support for any food security initiatives during this time. Please reach out to the Nutrition Advisory Team at [laura.white@canada.ca.](mailto:laura.white@canada.ca)
- Communities are encouraged to continue essential service delivery.
  - Existing processes are still in place to support Child and Family Services, and Jordan's Principle. Expenses can continue to be submitted through these existing processes, even if related to specific supports to respond to COVID-19 response efforts by First Nations child and family services agencies or by families or service providers related to the needs of specific children.

Actions individuals and families can take

Looking after yourself and your family during these times is more important than ever.

- Take steps to protect yourself and others:
  - Practice social distancing.
  - Practice good hygiene: wash hands often for at least 20 seconds, cover coughs and sneezes, and avoid touching face.
  - monitor for symptoms: cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat
  - Self-isolate for the legally-required 10 days if you have any symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing illness or medical condition.
  - Take the COVID-19 self-assessment if you're concerned about your health.
- Find a new routine. Planning and following a new routine can lend a sense of order, especially for children.
- Do not lose track of the basics of healthy living: eat healthy foods as much as possible; stay connected with other family members, friends and co-workers while maintaining social (physical) distancing; get a good night's sleep; go outside for a walk or kick a soccer ball around in your backyard or stomp around in the snow; limit alcohol and recreational drugs.
- Most of all, **reach out for help if you need it.** Your community, First Nation Nations and Inuit Health - AB (FNIHB-AB), Alberta Health Services, and the Government of Alberta have various supports and assistance for Albertans.

Mental health and coping

- The COVID-19 pandemic can have a significant impact on Albertans' mental health. Resources are available if you, or someone you know, is struggling or needs a little extra support.
  - Please visit https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/amh/if-amh-mhpip-disaster-pandemic-covid-19-and-your-mental-health.pdf https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/amh/if-amh-mhpip-disaster-pandemic-practical-and-emotional-preparedness.pdf
  - The Mental Health Help Line 1-877-303-2642 is available 24/7 to provide advice and referrals to community supports near you.
  - Hope for Wellness Help Line 1-855-242-3310, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
  - Kids and teens can call the Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868.
  - Text COVID19HOPE to 393939 to subscribe to a free service supporting mental health and wellness in a time of stress and isolation.

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

COVID-19 Data for Alberta
https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-alberta-data.aspx

Alberta Health Services – novel coronavirus (COVID-19)
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

World Health Organization – Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak
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

For helpful advice on handling stressful situations and ways to talk to children please visit
- o Mental health and coping with COVID-19 (CDC)
- o Talking with children about COVID-19 (CDC)
- o Help in Tough Times (AHS)

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

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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:
sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca