



EPHO

Environmental Public Health Officers In First Nations communities



Indigenous Services
Canada

Services aux
Autochtones Canada

Canada

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Environmental Public Health Services in First Nations communities

Indigenous Services Canada is responsible for working with First Nations communities to help identify and prevent public health risks. Environmental Public Health Officers work collaboratively with First Nations to help prevent disease, ensure safe environments and build healthier communities. Find out more about all of the activities and services we provide in First Nations communities.

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Commitment to First Nations

Environmental Public Health Officers are committed to:

- collaborating with First Nations to develop program activities
- responding quickly to community environmental public health needs
- providing advocacy and expertise in environmental public health
- supporting First Nations in building capacity for environmental public health
- using culturally appropriate education and outreach methods
- recognizing environmental public health is part of holistic wellness
- respecting First Nations cultures and their connection to the environment



Environmental Public Health Services in First Nations communities



Environmental Public Health Services are primarily delivered by Environmental Public Health Officers (EPHOs), who must be certified by the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors. EPHOs provide advice, guidance, environmental public health inspections and recommendations to First Nations and their leadership.

EPHOs work with community-based drinking water quality monitors, public health technicians, engineers and other technical experts to protect and improve the health of communities by identifying and managing risks in the natural and human made environment. Climate change can exacerbate existing risks and introduce new hazards.



Services delivered and funded by Indigenous Services Canada support First Nations communities south of 60 degrees. Territorial governments manage these service for communities north of 60 degrees. In British Columbia, these services are managed by the First Nations Health Authority. Where there are self-government agreements (for example the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement), these services are delivered by the First Nations' provider of choice.



Role of Environmental Public Health Officers

EPHOs who deliver services in First Nations communities work for Indigenous Services Canada and First Nations organizations.

EPHOs conduct inspections, assessments, and investigations to identify environmental public health risks in communities and provide related evidence-based recommendations, advice and guidance to take corrective action that helps protect environmental public health. EPHOs also provide education and training to First Nations communities on a variety of environmental public health topics.



EPHOs working in First Nations communities South of 60 provide services in the following areas:

- drinking water
- health housing
- public facilities
- food safety
- wastewater
- solid waste
- environmental communicable disease control
- emergency preparedness and response



EPHOs collaborate with:

- First Nations organizations and agencies
- other public health professionals
- medical health officers and other health authorities
- academia
- owners and/or operators of public facilities, water and wastewater treatment plants
- residents and leaders of First Nations communities, including Chiefs and Councils, as well as federal, provincial and municipal government departments and agencies





**What
we do:**

Drinking water

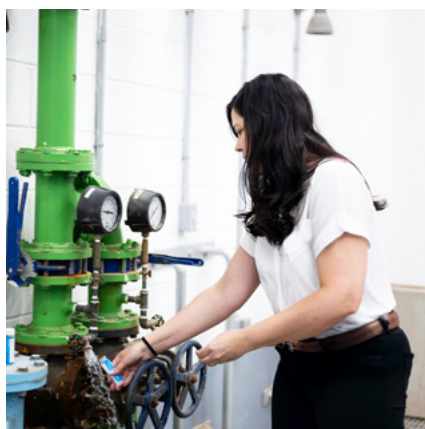
Access to safe and reliable drinking water is essential. The Environmental Public Health Services team undertakes activities related to drinking water in First Nations communities.

Assessment

- Test and assess drinking water in community systems, cisterns, and wells
- Review water quality results to determine if the drinking water meets applicable standards
- Advise and provide recommendations to communities on drinking water issues
- Evaluate plans for new or upgraded drinking water systems, including individual wells and cisterns, together with public health engineers employed or funded by Indigenous Services Canada

Collaboration

- Work with community leadership and residents to share information about and collaborate on safe drinking water and risk prevention
- Train and support Community-Based Drinking Water Monitors to test and verify drinking water quality





Healthy housing

What we do:

A healthy home provides the conditions needed for safety, hygiene, comfort, and overall well-being. It also provides a safe space for cultural practices that can strengthen connections with community, culture, language and identity. The Environmental Public Health Services team works with First Nations communities and other agencies to address housing-related environmental public health concerns.

Assessment

- Inspect on-reserve housing, upon request, to identify housing-related health hazards such as unsanitary conditions, poor indoor air quality, and overcrowding
- Review plans for new housing developments and renovation plans to ensure they meet public health standards
- Advise community leadership, community workers, and residents about potential environmental public health concerns at all stages of housing development, including design, construction, occupancy, and demolition

Collaboration

- Work with community members, community workers, community housing managers, and community leadership on how to maintain safe and healthy homes
- Raise awareness and provide education on housing-related environmental public health issues





Public buildings and community facilities

What we do:

The Environmental Public Health Services team works with First Nations communities to help prevent the spread of diseases, reduce health risks, and make public spaces safer.

Assessment

- Inspect facilities regularly, routinely or upon request, to check general structure, sanitation, safety conditions, food safety practices, water quality, waste disposal, pest control, crowding, and air quality
- Review plans for new or renovated facilities to ensure they meet public health standards
- Provide education and awareness sessions on public health and safety in facilities to community leadership, facility operators, and community members

Types of facilities inspected

- Health facilities: Clinics, nursing stations, hospitals, long-term care homes and other facilities
- Community care facilities: Day-cares, group homes, Head Starts, schools, youth drop-in centres, retirement homes, Elders lodges, treatment centres and wellness centres
- Recreational facilities: Arenas, beaches, billiard halls, bingo halls, bowling alleys, campgrounds, casinos, community centres, curling rinks, golf courses, parks, playgrounds, swimming facilities, and seasonal monitoring of recreational water
- Personal service establishments: Such as barber shops, hair salons, spas, tattoo parlours
- General facilities: Administration offices, animal shelters, bed and breakfasts, fire stations, funeral homes, gas stations, hotels/motels, industrial sites, lodges, marinas, rooming houses, and other public buildings
- Temporary special event facilities: Sites where community gatherings such as pow-wows, Treaty Days and sports competitions are held



Collaboration

- Work with Indigenous partners and other government departments to raise awareness on environmental public health concerns in facilities



Food safety

What we do:

Food safety is about making sure food is obtained, transported, handled, stored, prepared, and shared safely. The Environmental Public Health Services team works with community leadership, food service operators, and community members to prevent foodborne illnesses in First Nations communities. This includes both traditional and store-bought foods.

Assessment

- Regularly inspect food service facilities such as grocery stores, restaurants, mobile food trucks, school cafeterias and kitchens, and food preparation areas in community care facilities, such as daycares and long-term care facilities
- Inspect temporary food services offered during community events like pow-wows, Treaty Days, and sports competitions
- Review plans for new or upgraded food facilities to ensure they meet public health standards
- Share alerts and recalls about unsafe food products
- Investigate suspected or confirmed foodborne illness and complaints

Collaboration

- Collaborate with medical health officers and other health authorities on complaints, follow-ups and inspections
- Work with community leadership, community members, volunteers and operators to ensure food safety practices are followed
- Provide food safety education to food handlers





Wastewater

What we do:

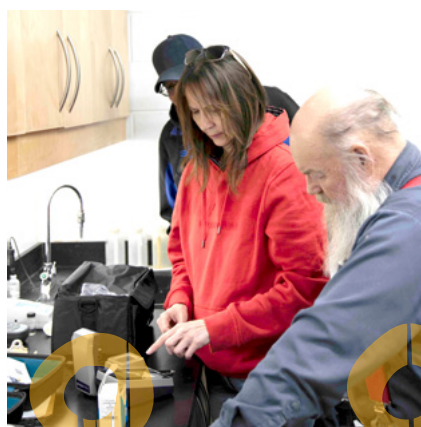
Effective wastewater management (i.e. treatment and disposal) is a cornerstone of public health and environmental sustainability. Wastewater management is essential for protecting human health, sustaining the environment, and supporting resilient communities. Environmental Public Health Services help First Nations communities to identify and address public health risks related to poor or unsafe wastewater management.

Assessment

- Provide advice, guidance and recommendations on the installation of new and modified on-site wastewater disposal systems from design to final as built, as well as decommissioning of systems
- Respond to complaints by providing public health inspections of existing on-site sewage disposal systems when appropriate
- Investigate wastewater system failures to prevent the transmission of disease
- Inspect wastewater treatment systems if there is a public health concern
- Provide advice, guidance and recommendations related to wastewater treatment systems

Collaboration

- Consult with and provide advice to the community about potential health hazards arising from wastewater
- Offer advice and information about on-site wastewater systems to the community
- Educate communities and individuals about proper maintenance of individual on-site wastewater systems





Solid waste management

What we do:

Effective solid waste management is essential for keeping communities safe and healthy. The Environmental Public Health Services team helps First Nations communities to identify and address public health risks related to solid waste management.

Assessment

- Situational awareness of disposal sites and transfer stations from a public health perspective, such as pest control and containment of waste
- Respond to public health complaints related to solid waste
- Review and assess plans upon request for new or upgraded solid waste disposal management sites and practices together with engineers
- Review decommissioning plans and recommend safe practices for closing disposal sites

Collaboration

- Provide advice and recommendations to community leadership, builders, operators, and community members on solid waste management issues
- Educate communities about environmental public health concerns related to solid waste management
- Offer information and referrals for recycling, hazardous waste disposal (for example, batteries, paints), and proper waste collection and storage





Environmental communicable disease control

What we do:

Environmental Public Health Services plays an important role in preventing illnesses and controlling the spread of environmental communicable disease in First Nations communities. Regular inspections, water monitoring and food handler training reduce the risk of diseases such as *E. coli* and *Norovirus*.

Specific surveillance, investigation and educational activities are also sometimes undertaken to address specific environmental health communicable diseases (for example, water- or foodborne illness, or vector borne disease, such as "*West Nile virus*").

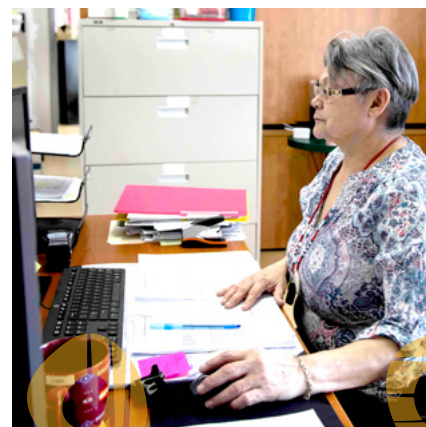
Assessment

- Conduct surveillance to identify, prevent, and respond to cases of communicable environmental diseases
- Undertake food and waterborne illness investigations
- Undertake animal bite investigations
- Offer training and education on cleaning and disinfection
- Upon request, EPHOs may aid in investigations, source identification, sampling, and monitoring
- Provide advice, guidance and recommendations to community leadership, facility owners, staff and First Nations residents about environmental public health risks related to communicable disease control



Collaboration

- Work with community leadership and health authorities to address confirmed or suspected cases of environmental health communicable disease
- Provide advice and recommendations on managing environmental communicable disease risks in First Nations communities
- Raise awareness among community leadership and community members about preventing the spread of diseases





Emergency preparedness and response

What we do:

First Nations communities must be ready to handle a variety of emergencies such as floods, forest fires, chemical spills, storms, contaminated food or water, and disease outbreaks. Environmental Public Health Services help ensure public health considerations are included in emergency plans, response activities and recovery efforts.

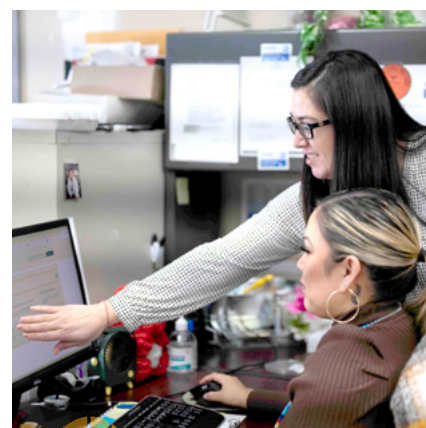
Assessment

- Provide advice and support in the development of Emergency Preparedness and Response Plans for First Nations communities
- Provide environmental public health risk assessments in communities during and following emergencies
- Provide advice when there are concerns about air quality
- Support evacuations and repatriations in coordination with provincial authorities, health units and other authorities
- Inspect reception sites, temporary housing, public buildings, drinking water, evacuation food services, and waste systems as needed
- Help in planning and inspecting clean air and cooling shelters
- Provide emergency-related services such as inspections and assessments, public health investigations, food handler training and water testing



Collaboration

- Advise community leadership and community members on environmental public health issues related to emergencies
- Participate in community emergency management teams (when requested by leadership)
- Share information with communities about preparing for, and responding to, environmental public health risks during emergencies
- Share information and resources with community leadership and community members on safely returning after an emergency evacuation



Interested in becoming an EPHO?

Environmental Public Health Officers are highly sought after professionals. They do work that is exciting and rewarding. They earn a good salary and make a difference in the communities they serve.

Indigenous Services Canada and Indigenous organizations are hiring EPHOs to work in First Nations communities.

To learn more about this in-demand profession visit: canada.ca/epho-isc



Contacts

