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Information for Indigenous communities:
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COVID-19 UPDATE

Confirmation of Cases and Contact Tracing in First Nations Communities

The public health system and how health care is administered in First Nations communities is different in each province and territory.

If/when a case of COVID-19 is confirmed in a First Nation, the specific/administrative steps taken by regional/local health officials will vary according to provincial/territorial guidelines. However, the principles and priorities of providing support as required and ensuring that each case is managed appropriately remain the same across the country.

Please note that the First Nations Health Authority, which is responsible for the oversight of delivery of health care to First Nations in British Columbia, has prepared the following specific: [Notice and Follow-up Process for a Confirmed Case in a First Nations Community](#)

What happens when a case of COVID-19 is confirmed in a First Nation community?

- The specific/administrative steps will vary from one region to another, but the priorities will always be:
 - Ensuring that the affected person is informed of their status, knows the appropriate steps to take care of themselves and their loved ones (e.g. self-isolation), and has access to medical care as needed.
 - Putting immediate measures in place to reduce the chances of further spread, including contact tracing, and implementing the community pandemic emergency response plan.
 - Providing additional support to the First Nation, as required.

What is contact tracing?

Contact tracing is a process to identify and keep a log of individuals who may have come into close contact with someone with a COVID-19 infection.

- While the detailed process may vary from one region to another, contact tracing is always conducted following well established public health practices.
- Anyone who is identified through the contact tracing process as being at risk for COVID-19 infection will be informed directly by public health officials. The public health officials will also explain the appropriate steps that the person should take (e.g. self-isolation at home).





Who is considered a “contact?”

- Anyone who has been in close contact with someone with a COVID-19 infection may be considered a “contact.” The level of risk of infection, however, will vary, depending on what kind of “contact” has happened.
- Close personal contact, such as caregiving, hugging or kissing, sharing food, cups or utensils, or living in the same household with someone who has a confirmed COVID-19 infection, are higher risk activities. There is a greater chance of the virus being transmitted through these kinds of contacts.
- Travel, working in a high risk environment (such as health care facilities, and participating in gatherings (e.g. ceremonial or cultural events), are also higher risk activities, and increase your chances of being exposed to the virus.
- Anyone identified through a contact tracing process who is considered at risk for transmission of the COVID-19 virus from that specific contact, will be informed directly. At that time public health officials will also explain the appropriate steps that the person should take (e.g. self-isolation at home, testing, etc.).
- Public health officials may not contact people who are identified through the contact tracing process, but who are considered low risk for transmission of the virus.

Why does contact tracing take so long?

Contact tracing is a complex, and labour intensive process. How long it takes depends on the situation. If the affected person has travelled recently, attended large gatherings, or been in close contact with a large number of other people, the contact tracing process will take longer than for someone who has already been self-isolating at home and carefully following other precautions.

I know of/have heard of a case of COVID-19 in my community. Why are their names not being released?

No personal information about anyone affected by COVID-19 will be publicly released. Even during health emergencies federal and provincial/territorial privacy rules still apply, and we must continue to respect everyone’s dignity and privacy. Personal information, including the name, home community, and health information about people affected by COVID-19 will only be shared as necessary with health officials.

Keep in mind too, that many First Nation communities are very small. Sharing personal information can be harmful to individuals and can put entire communities at risk by making it more difficult for health professionals to provide appropriate care.

We ask for everyone in affected communities to respect the privacy of their friends, family and neighbours, as we all work through this difficult time



Do the Chief/community leaders/elders know who the affected person is?

Chiefs and/or other community leaders are informed ONLY that there is a case of COVID-19 in their community. This is so that they can take appropriate action to protect and support the community, according to established emergency plans. NO personal or identifying information will be released to Chiefs, community leaders or other non-health officials.

How do I know if I have been in contact with an infected person if I do not know who they are?

If contact tracing indicates that you are at risk from contact with someone infected with COVID-19, health officials will contact you directly. These health officials will also explain what you should do next (e.g. self-isolate at home, get tested, etc.).

If you have not been contacted by health officials, but you are still worried that you may have come into contact with someone infected with COVID-19, self-isolate at home, and contact your local health care provider.

Your health is too important to take action based on rumours, social media postings, or news from unreliable sources.

How do I keep my family and community safe if I do not know who is infected?

The best way to keep yourself, your family and your community safe is to follow instructions from health officials and other trusted, reliable sources.

These include:

- Avoid gatherings.
- Wash your hands, often, and for at least 20 seconds.
- Practice physical distancing, keep at least 6 feet – or 2 meters - between yourself and others.
- Cough or sneeze into your arm.
- If you feel unwell, self-isolate and contact your local health care provider.