



Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority Inc.



April 9, 2020

To: Chief and Council
Northern First Nations Communities

From: Dr. Nnamdi Ndubuka, Medical Health Officer, Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority (NITHA)

Re: Upcoming Holiday Long Weekend – High Risk of COVID-19 Transmission at Family/Mass Gatherings

Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority (NITHA) public health officials are concerned about the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks in communities during holiday gatherings, meals and religious observances. We have been informed that some communities are planning to host derbies during the upcoming holiday.

I humbly ask Chief & Councils, community leaders and our partners to work with NITHA to restrict in-person holiday gatherings over the weekend. So far, the collective efforts of individuals, families and communities to delay and prevent the spread of COVID-19 are working. Thank you for your impressive efforts. Unfortunately, our efforts to control the spread of COVID-19 must remain in-place (even over the holiday weekend) to be effective.

COVID-19 spreads rapidly during gatherings and does not “take a break” during special occasions. In Newfoundland, hundreds of people contracted COVID-19 and two people died so far after attending a funeral. A similar story in Seattle during a choir practice where nobody had symptoms. There could be undiscovered cases in your community right now who do not even know they are sick. Everyone must behave as if COVID-19 is already circulating in the community.

We want to ensure you do not experience a COVID-19 outbreak in your community because of gathering over the weekend. The most recent public health order restricts gatherings to no more than 10 people in one room, unless they reside in the same home. Here are some suggestions to comply with this order and protect your community from an outbreak. These strategies limit physical connection while maintaining social, mental, emotional and spiritual connection:

- Restrict in-person holiday gatherings to only people living in the same home. We especially recommend restricting visitors from outside your community.
- Consider a virtual gathering or religious service or make phone calls to family.
- Deliver extra food to Elders or families in-need but do not visit or make in-person contact.
- Practice handwashing, environmental cleaning, physical distancing at every possible opportunity.
- Work with knowledge keepers to reduce the risk of exposure during spring ceremonies.

This is an unprecedented time for everyone. Some may feel distressed and overwhelmed with physical distancing specifically around celebration times. It's important to follow the precautionary measures in the Public Health Order, but we must also focus on overall well-being and self-care.

Please be reminded of the available mental health counseling eligible through:
Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Mental Health Counselling Benefit. Additional information is available on: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1576441552462/1576441618847> or by directly contacting NIHB Saskatchewan Regional Office: 1-866-885-3933.

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line: 1-855-242-3310 or the on-line chat at hopeforwellness.ca. It's toll-free and open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

FOR MORE COVID-19 RELATED INFORMATION

- Questions and requests related to COVID-19 should be sent to our generic email address at nithaeoc@nitha.com to allow our team to provide you with a coordinated and timely response.
- General information on COVID-19 and provincial resources can be found at: www.saskatchewan.ca/coronavirus and www.canada.ca/coronavirus.
- Individuals who are concerned about symptoms or risks related to COVID-19 should call **Healthline 811** or the community health center or use the online self-assessment tool found here <https://public.ehealthsask.ca/sites/COVID-19/>

We encourage you and your community health team to continue to participate in the weekly NITHA COVID-19 Working Group Meetings held on Tuesdays 10:00am – 11:00am and Information Sessions offered jointly with FNIIH-ISC on Thursday afternoons at 2:00pm – 3:00pm.

Attached are some social media materials to help you share these messages widely among your network.

Respectfully,



Dr. Nnamdi Ndubuka
Medical Health Officer
Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority