



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness



An FNHA plan to fight disease with emergency management

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit British Columbia in early 2020, health authorities scrambled to allocate resources toward helping health care workers deal with the surge.

Throughout 2020 and now into the New Year, the FNHA is building on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic to continue supporting communities. Although the FNHA had already been working on updating disease response planning since August of 2019, the emergence of the Coronavirus was a shock to the health care system that pushed the use of the [Communicable Disease Emergency Response](#) (CDER) plan to the forefront.

The document, which is based on aspects of emergency planning structures for things like natural disasters, emphasizes the unique challenges and approaches specific to communicable disease and public health.

“It was recognized in BC that despite the health emergencies in the past, this event emphasized the need for planning and preparedness in communicable disease,” says Daniel Chan, FNHA Communicable Disease Emergency (CDE) / Infection Prevention and Control Nurse Coordinator.

Daniel says the CDER Plan (which is phonetically pronounced as “cedar”) should ideally be a “living document” which will continue to be updated by each community based on changes and experiences of First Nations communities and supporting partners. The goal for FNHA is to provide a template that is user friendly, easy to follow, and adaptable for communities to use, whether they are in the developing or updating phase of their CDER plan.



As all communities are unique, with individual strengths and challenges, Daniel says the planning template is designed to be a guidance tool rather than a prescriptive plan.

“It takes a mountain-top view of community CDER planning. It becomes a plan only when communities take this template and apply their own knowledge and understanding to it based on their vantage point from the river’s edge of their community. There is no one CDER plan that fits for everyone. It is specific to each community and it lives, grows, and transforms with communities.”

In many respects the CDER Plan differs from a natural disaster emergency plan as a CDE event could take longer than a few days or weeks. As COVID-19 nears its second year, CDE Nurse Advisor Sheila Paquette says the health factors are multi-faceted. Beyond fighting the disease, there’s the broader impact on health services, the unintended consequences of public health measures on the opioid crisis and increased need for mental health supports.

“Additionally, the ongoing disruptions to our daily lives, the inability to plan for the future and effects of isolation and information overload have made it difficult for many to cope,” says Sheila. “We have been listening to the strength and wisdom of communities’ who are drawing on their culture and resiliency, to make it through these hard times.”

As a “novel” virus, COVID-19 has taken time to understand in terms of how it spreads, explains Shero Nand, another CDE Nurse Advisor on the team, which is why the CDER plan is intended to be flexible, allowing for it to change as the situation does.

“There are so many priorities and they keep changing based on the situation, such as linking people to resources and teams to provide wrap around supports,” says Shero. “One of the most

essential steps of being prepared for a response is having a plan and then testing out the plan through scenario discussions and tabletop exercises. What is written in a response plan has to be applicable at the end of the day.”

The CDE Team is currently collaborating with numerous partners both within and outside FNHA, and leaning into the wisdom of First Nations Communities to guide their work.

Looking beyond COVID-19, conventional wisdom dictates this isn’t the last pandemic the world will ever see, so the CDER plan aims to prepare communities for what may come. Using the lessons learned from past responses to outbreaks, epidemics or even pandemics, that can help inform planning processes, mindful that the needs of First Nations communities are unique.

The following are some supports the FNHA CDE team can provide:

- Updating/creating a CDER plan
- Scenario/exercise planning discussions
- Tabletop exercises
- Full scale exercises
- CDER Planning funding information
- Answer questions related to CDER planning

For more information, visit the [CDER page](#) on FNHA.ca or email: cdmgmt@fnha.ca

