



FNHA/FNHC/FNHDA Advise Against All Gatherings to Prevent COVID-19 Spreading

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 21, 2020

COAST SALISH TERRITORY – VANCOUVER, BC – The First Nations Health Authority, the First Nations Health Council and the First Nations Health Directors Association are strongly advising communities to cancel or postpone all community and cultural gatherings until the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.

With the increasing evidence about the rapid spread of COVID-19 in British Columbia, and on the advice of public health physicians, the First Nations Health Authority also strongly recommends against any unnecessary travel.

Furthermore, given the unprecedented risk COVID-19 presents, physical distancing is absolutely necessary to prevent serious illness and death in our communities. Please stay at least six feet apart from each other at all time. We are particularly concerned about the Elders and Knowledge Keepers, young children, and those with chronic disease. It is imperative that all of us take responsibility to care for each other by following this public health advice.

We do not make this recommendation lightly—we acknowledge the significance of cultural gatherings and events for First Nations communities, but from a public health standpoint we have the responsibility to communicate the severity of this rapidly evolving situation. Please cancel upcoming events, and reschedule for after this pandemic has passed.

Quotes:

Dr. Shannon McDonald, FNHA Deputy Chief Medical Officer:

“COVID-19 is a severe respiratory disease that is very easy to transmit from person to person, and that can have deadly consequences. It is in our province and potentially in your community. It only takes one person to carry the disease to their family and community. Gatherings of any kind present an unreasonable risk.



We have a very brief opportunity to prevent the spread and the devastating consequences of this disease in our communities. Any gathering where close contact occurs can cause transmission and none of us are immune. I am especially worried about our Elders, young children and those with underlying health issues.”

Colleen Erickson, FNHA Board Chair

“The responsibility lies with each and every one of us to do everything possible to protect ourselves so in turn we protect our families, our elders and community. Especially our Elders who are the keepers of our oral history, language and age old wisdom.”

Charlene Belleau, Chair, First Nations Health Council

“The FNHC calls on Hereditary Chiefs, Matriarchs and Spiritual Leaders to help community leadership reinforce the critical public health advice to postpone cultural gatherings and large ceremonies. Please heed this critical advice – our spiritual teachings place our Elders and most vulnerable citizens at the forefront of our collective responsibilities to our Nations. During this time of self-isolation and social distancing (6-feet from each other), please use this time for prayer and self-reflection, stay safe and protect the health of you and your family.”

Keith Marshall, President, First Nations Health Directors Association

“We thank and acknowledge those working on the front lines to support community health, including the 150+ Health Directors in BC and our nurses and health professionals. We especially appreciate the work of Health Directors, Chiefs and health boards to ensure community health centres remain open for essential services in this crisis; and we encourage all Health Directors to practice self-care during this extraordinary time.”

Learn more:

Go to www.fnha.ca/coronavirus for up-to-date information on COVID-19 and resources for you community.



Media Contact:

John Moody

Telephone: 1-604-831-4898

Email: john.moody@fnha.ca

For more on this topic please see this article: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/covid-suspend-sweat-lodges-pipe-ceremonies-1.5504541>

To find out more about First Nations Health Authority, visit: <http://www.fnha.ca/>