



FNHA Reports 86 First Nations Cases of COVID-19 to June 14, 2020

June 26, 2020

First Nations Health Authority

Coast Salish Territory – The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) released data today that show First Nations people in British Columbia (BC) have fared better than the rest of the population with the COVID-19 pandemic, thanks to a strong response from First Nations communities.

The First Nations Health Authority is unique in Canada, in that, through our longstanding partnerships with the Ministry of Health and Indigenous Services Canada, we are able to link provincial health information and data sets to the First Nations Client file, which identifies status First Nations people regardless of where they reside in BC. The COVID-19 testing database, held by BCCDC, was used to create this First Nations specific data to provide a clear picture of the number of First Nations people who have tested positive for COVID-19 – both on and off reserve.

Partner health authorities tested 5,434 First Nations for COVID-19 between January 1 and June, 14, 2020. To date, 86 First Nation individuals in BC have tested positive for COVID-19, of which 42 live on reserve. In total, 19 First Nations were hospitalized, although no patients remain in hospital. Of those who fell ill, 81 have now recovered. Sadly, there were three First Nations deaths.

First Nations communities have been at the heart of the response, implementing measures to limit travel in and out of communities, as well as cancelling large gatherings that, although so central to many Nations' culture, could have accelerated the spread of the virus.

The FNHA has responded to community direction by sourcing and distributing 715,000 pieces of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to frontline health care workers, launching the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day tele-health service, and supported the rollout of a provincial framework to help people living in rural, remote and First Nation communities in BC access critical health care among other initiatives.

Under Phase 2 and 3 of the BC Restart Plan, the Province is slowly easing restrictions and allowing businesses to resume operations with careful planning and guidelines as the economy begins to recover.

The FNHA's main recommendation of physical distancing, frequent hand washing and avoiding large gatherings will continue to remain in place for the protection of all our families and communities. These recommendations are in alignment with the PHO guidelines.

Background:

Some of FNHA's key external initiatives during the COVID-19 outbreak are:

- Launched the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day, a tele-health program that makes doctors available to all BC First Nations and their families by phone or internet.
- Sourced and distributed more than 715,000 pieces of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to frontline health care workers in communities.
- The organization has supported the rollout of a provincial framework to help people living in rural, remote and First Nation communities in BC access critical health care.
- Developed a Services Resumption Planning Guide for communities based on best practices and guided by self-determination.
- Integrated FNHA staff into the provincial emergency response structures.
- Collaborated with health governance partners, the First Nations Health Council (FNHC) and the First Nations Health Directors Association (FNHDA), to provide up-to-date and culturally safe public health messaging directly to communities, leadership and to all clients through our website.

- The FNHDA sourced and posted on FNHDA.ca a range of community-based Wise Practices from Health Directors across the province for adaptation and use by others as relevant.
- In support of the business resumption process, sourced non-medical community services COVID-19 supplies such as bleach, gloves, masks and hand sanitizers for communities.
- The new FNHA Mobile App will offer information to support the health, wellness and safety of BC First Nations.
- Launched the AtHoc emergency messaging system, which allows the FNHA to provide vital information directly to leadership via text.
- Guided the creation of mental health resources provincially.
- Provided multiple weekly webinars on COVID-19 to enable community leadership and health directors to get the most up to date information and answers to their questions about the pandemic.
- Supported communities in planning their response to the pandemic.
- Created templates with key information/resources to answer community questions and keep them informed.

Quotes:

- “The data tell us that the sacrifices made by Chiefs and community frontline workers made a difference in flattening the curve for First Nations people,” said Charlene Belleau, Chair of the First Nations Health Council. “We grieve with those who lost loved ones. We must stay vigilant with physical distancing and keeping our family bubbles small as our communities consider re-opening – to continue keeping our most vulnerable safe, including our Elders and Knowledge Keepers.”
- “The preparation, caution and hard work of First Nations communities in combating the spread of COVID-19 have played an important role in our collective success in flattening the COVID-19 curve in our province,” said Health Minister Adrian Dix, “That’s why we are supporting the First Nations Health Authority, community leaders and partners with an historic collaborative framework that will help ensure people living in rural, remote and Indigenous communities in B.C. have access to critical health care they can count on to meet their unique needs during this unprecedented pandemic and into the future. ”

- “From the outset we have recognized the differential impact previous pandemics have had on Indigenous Peoples in B.C. and have supported the many efforts of First Nations communities to put precautions and plans in place to protect their communities and especially their Elders,” said Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.’s provincial health officer. “Their work and the work of the FNHA has been so important in reducing the impact of COVID-19 on First Nations people in B.C. and we will continue to do all we can to support communities to stay vigilant and stay safe.”
- “Our success has been rooted in working with our partners and listening to our communities,” said M. Colleen Erickson, Chair of the First Nations Health Authority Board of Directors. “This helped us recognize the importance of Mental Health and Wellness supports early on, and the need to hasten the introduction of initiatives like the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day.”
- “I would characterize our approach as one of partnership with First Nation leadership, the BC Ministry of Health, the Health Authorities and the federal government. Data will be the means by which we support the health and wellness of BC First Nations and target and measure the effectiveness of our collective actions,” said Richard Jock, FNHA’s Interim Chief Executive Officer.
- “It is a success to build on, but we need to be more watchful than ever to ensure we continue to protect the most vulnerable among us,” said Dr. Shannon McDonald, FNHA’s Acting Chief Medical Officer. “Thankfully, we are seeing our communities continuing to rise to the challenge, and while the remoteness of many communities has helped protect them to date, there are no guarantees where this previously unknown virus is concerned. We approach resumption of activities with caution, and the knowledge of the ongoing risk.”
- “We honour the work of Health Directors and wellness leads for their tireless efforts to keep our communities and people safe over the past several months. The FNHDA’s Wise Practices show the innovation and creativity of communities as they adapted to the COVID-19 response,” said Keith Marshall, President of the First Nations Health Directors Association. “We know that the mental health supports have been essential to help our frontline workers cope with the added stress, and to also help families in their community.”

Release data

- 5,434 First Nations people in BC were tested for COVID-19 between January 1 and June 14, 2020
- 86 First Nations individuals in BC tested positive for COVID-19 during this time frame, 42 of them lived on or near a reserve
- There were three First Nations deaths
- 19 First Nations people were hospitalized
- Of those who fell ill, 81 have now recovered
- No patients remain in hospital

Learn more:

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

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