



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

COVID-19 Supports for the Seasonal Holidays

As the holiday season draws near, it's usually a time for families and friends to gather together. But as infections of COVID-19 continue to spread into December, now is not the time to lower our guard against COVID-19. We need to [stay strong and stay the course](#), however long it takes.

We understand that during seasonal holidays, people are tempted to leave their “bubbles” and visit others. However, COVID-19 spreads through events like gatherings and [cultural ceremonies](#), so we must resist the temptation for our—and our loved ones—safety.

THE MEDICINE OF RESILIENCE

FNHA Acting Chief Medical Officer Dr. Shannon McDonald has urged us to “take care of each other” during this ongoing pandemic. That means being calm, [kind](#) and—above all—safe. We can only continue to be safe by observing caution and protecting each other, especially our Elders and people who are vulnerable, through physical distancing, handwashing, and wearing masks.

There are numerous methods you can use to [cultivate resilience](#) during these challenging times. Focus on the positive things in your life. Cultivate gratitude and hope, and try to keep things in perspective. This, too, shall pass.

The [Good Medicine Initiative](#) shares how we, as Indigenous people across BC, use culture, traditional knowledge and spirituality to support ourselves and each other throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As well, Indigenous Youth in BC have shared their wellness tips during the pandemic, from exercising and walking, to harvesting traditional foods and medicines. [Watch their videos](#) to learn more about their resiliency.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Feeling worried during a crisis is normal. You may have feelings of distress due to the uncertainty we are experiencing. You might even find that the COVID-19 pandemic triggers symptoms of trauma. Living through a pandemic can affect mental health and wellness. By being aware of these negative impacts on our wellness, we are better able to cope with them.

If you need immediate assistance: call 9-1-1 or the BC Suicide Prevention & Crisis Centre: 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433) or go to your nearest hospital.

For culturally safe support, call the KUU-US 24-hr Crisis Line.

- Adult/Elder Crisis Line: 250-723-4050
- Child/Youth Crisis Line: 250-723-2040

There are other numerous [mental health and cultural supports](#) available both online and via telephone.

CELEBRATE VIRTUALLY

By staying [connected to each other](#), supporting each other, and helping each other to maintain and build our resilience, we will get through this pandemic. Please reach out and connect with family members, friends, and health providers when you need to. Try and check in with your family members regularly to see how they are doing.

Instead of meeting during the holidays, host a [virtual social gathering](#) by using the many free technologies available, such as Zoom, Facebook messenger, Google, Skype, and others.

EHEALTH SUPPORTS

FNHA's [eHealth and Virtual Health](#) has counselling appointments available conducted by phone or video conferencing (e.g., Zoom, Skype or FaceTime). These services are trauma-informed and [culturally safe](#) for BC First Nations individuals, with a [wholistic focus on the FNHA Vision](#).

- [First Nations Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Services](#) provide specialists in addictions medicine and psychiatry, on call weekdays to support individuals and their family members with more complex mental health needs.
- Our [First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day](#) program also provides on-call medical support seven days a week for medical advice, prescriptions and referrals.
- First Nations Health Benefits provides coverage for clients to attend virtual and in-person counselling sessions. See [Mental Health](#) in Health Benefits (or view [a list of approved mental health providers](#)).
- The [Maternity and Babies Advice Line](#) provides services to expectant mothers and new parents, guardians or caregivers of newborn babies in rural and remote communities in BC. Family members and healthcare providers can also receive support.

Consider also the opportunity for [Land-Based Healing and Wellness](#) during COVID-19.

OVERDOSE PREVENTION AND HARM REDUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a rise in substance use, which has had a disproportionate impact on First Nations people in BC, particularly for risk of overdose. Please consider downloading the [LifeGuard App](#) if you or someone you know is using.

The FNHA takes a [Harm Reduction approach](#) to overdose prevention, stressing the importance of [practising lateral kindness as a way to support others](#), and avoiding language that shames or stigmatizes others.

There are [numerous treatment options](#) for harmful substance use, even during COVID-19. It is important to remember that substance use is a health issue, *not* a moral one.