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INTRODUCTION

This guide is designed to provide useful information to help you care for yourself and others during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

COVID-19 is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which spreads between people, mainly when an infected person is in close contact with another person.

Symptoms of COVID-19 can appear up to 14 days after being exposed to the virus, and are similar to other respiratory illnesses, including the flu and the common cold. Symptoms include fever or chills, cough, loss of smell or taste, sore throat and difficulty breathing, loss of appetite, extreme fatigue or tiredness, head and body aches, nausea or vomiting and diarrhea. COVID-19 illness can range from mild to severe.

COVID-19 is spread by the respiratory droplets an infected person produces when they breathe, cough, sneeze, talk or sing. If you are in contact with an infected person, the virus can enter your body if droplets get into your throat, nose or eyes. Although infection from contact with contaminated surfaces is possible, it seems to be less common than droplets from close contact with an infected person.

Elders, people with chronic health or respiratory conditions, pregnant people, and people with compromised immune systems due to disease or treatment have a higher risk of getting serious complications if they become sick. Due to the high risk of transmission in remote or isolated First Nations communities and systemic barriers to supportive care in the BC health care system, Indigenous people have been prioritized for the COVID-19 vaccines.
PREVENTION AND PROTECTION

How to Avoid and Limit the Spread of Infection

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Physical distancing is limiting close contact with other people to slow the spread of infectious disease. An example of physical distancing is keeping two metres (six feet) apart from others. This technique has been proven to be one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of illness during an outbreak.

Inside your “bubble” (your immediate household, for example) you may act as usual. Outside of your bubble, please continue to protect your personal space and avoid using the usual greetings such as handshakes, hugs, and kisses. Safe greetings include a wave, a nod, or an “air hug”.

FACEMASKS

Non-medical (cloth) facemasks are recommended for people 12 years and older during the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce transmission of the virus. Masks help protect you and the people around you when you are sharing space with people outside your bubble. They work best when everyone who can wear a mask is wearing one. Facemasks must be worn in all public indoor settings, such as grocery shopping, and also while using public transit. Be sure to wash your facemask between uses. Wearing a medical mask is required for patients, clients and visitors to health care facilities and hospitals. Medical masks are usually provided upon entry if you do not have your own.

HANDWASHING

In addition to physical distancing, the most important thing you can do to prevent infection is to wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If a sink is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60 per cent alcohol to clean your hands. It is safe to wash your hands with soap and water if you are living in a community with a Boil Water Advisory (BWA) or a Do Not Consume (DNC) advisory. However, if you are living with a Do Not Use (DNU) advisory you should wash your hands with bottled water.

COVID-19 VACCINATION

Getting the COVID-19 vaccine not only protects you from the virus but it will also protect everyone around you too. Most vaccines require two doses for maximum protection. This includes the Pfizer, Moderna and Astra-Zeneca vaccines. The more people in a community who are vaccinated and therefore protected from COVID-19, the harder it is for the virus to spread. As more people get vaccinated, we will be able to return to activities that haven’t been possible during the pandemic.

For more information on the COVID-19 vaccines, visit our regularly updated FAQs here
**SOCIAL GATHERINGS**

All social gathering and events are suspended to significantly reduce COVID-19 transmission related to social interactions. No social gatherings of any size are allowed at your home with anyone other than the members of your bubble. For example, do not invite friends or family members that live outside your bubble into your home.

It is permissible for up to 10 people to gather outdoors. For example, up to 10 people at a park or a beach or up to 10 people in the backyard of a residence. Do not gather with different groups—stick to the same 10 people. Continue to practice recommended public health measures and maintain physical distancing. Outdoor patio areas at restaurants, pubs and bars are not included as areas where it is permissible to gather in groups of 10 at one table.

Please note that current orders and restrictions enacted by the BC Provincial Health officer may override the advice given here.

**TRAVEL**

All non-essential travel outside of your community should be avoided. For example, do not travel for a vacation or to visit friends or family members outside of your household or core bubble. Essential travel within BC includes regular travel for work within your region and travel for things like medical appointments and hospital visits. Many First Nations communities have declared a state of emergency and have enacted COVID-19 community protection by-laws, including travel bans for non-residents and non-essential visitors.

**CLEANING**

Regular cleaning and disinfecting in your home can help prevent the spread of illness including COVID-19 (also see Page 7 of this guide).
SYMPTOMS AND TESTING

Testing is used to determine if someone currently has COVID-19. The test is done by swishing and gargling salt water and spitting into a tube or by using a swab, such as a long Q-tip, that collects cells from the very back of a person's nose or throat. These tubes or swabs are then sent to a laboratory for testing.

Before getting tested, you can use this easy self-assessment tool from the BC provincial government to help determine whether you or a loved one need further assessment or testing for COVID-19: https://bc.thrive.health/

Testing is available for everyone who needs it. If symptoms appear, self-isolate and call your health care provider or 8-1-1 for guidance.

Click on the links below for a list of collection centres (i.e., testing site locations) in BC to find one near you. You can also call 8-1-1, your family doctor or your community health nurse to find the nearest collection centre.

- Collection centre finder (for mobile and desktop)
- Collection centre finder (for Internet Explorer)

Some communities (i.e., on-reserve) now have the capacity to test in community. Check with your community health nurse or health centre before leaving your community for testing.

If you need to be tested for COVID-19 and you cannot get to the testing location on your own, please call the BC Ambulance non-emergency line at 604-872-5151 for help travelling to the testing location.

COVID-19 TESTING AND STIGMA

It is essential that we all feel safe and confident getting tested for COVID-19, and that those who test positive still feel supported in their recovery and are not discriminated against.

Let's be kind to each other and thankful for all of the efforts and protective measures that individuals and communities are taking for the safety of us all. Read more about kindness and COVID-19 here.
MANAGING ILLNESS AND SELF-ISOLATION

SELF-ISOLATION AT HOME

Self-isolation means staying at home, not going to work or school, and minimizing how often you leave home.

- If testing shows that you have a coronavirus infection, you will need to isolate for 10 days starting from the first day you had symptoms or from the day of the test, if you don’t have symptoms. Please monitor your symptoms carefully and call 8-1-1 or your health care provider if you are having severe difficulty breathing (i.e., struggling to breathe or speaking in single words), experiencing severe chest pain, finding it very hard to wake up, feeling confused, or losing consciousness.

- If contact tracing shows that you have been exposed to the virus, a Public Health nurse will notify you and ask you to self-isolate for at least 14 days. It is important to self-isolate for the full 14 days because you can still spread the virus to others in the community even if you have no symptoms. You will also need to continue to self-isolate for 14 days even if your COVID-19 test comes back negative. During your self-isolation period, self-monitor for any developing symptoms and inform the Public Health team if you have any.

If you are infected and live with other people, you may still be able to self-isolate at home. Stay and sleep in a room with good airflow that is away from others. Use a separate bathroom if you can. If you are in the same room with anyone, avoid face-to-face contact and wear a facemask. Friends and family can drop off food outside your room or home.

Note that if one person in the household tests positive for COVID-19, the whole household needs to self-isolate even if the other household members do not have symptoms. This is because they have been in close contact with a confirmed case. Your Community Health Nurse or the Public Health team would provide further instructions related to this. If you live with an Elder or someone with a chronic health condition, that person would be better protected if they stayed in the home of other family members or friends nearby.

Health Benefits related to transportation and accommodation are available to support self-isolation. Details are in the FNHA Health Benefits Available section on page 10.
HOUSEKEEPING AND CLEANING

Keep the personal items such as toothbrush, cups, and cell phones of those who are sick separate from everyone else’s. Put all used paper towels, masks and tissues into trash bins lined with a plastic bag and empty the garbage frequently. Be sure to wash your hands afterwards. Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding or other items with those who are sick. Place laundry in a laundry basket with a plastic liner. Wash your laundry with regular laundry detergent and hot water and dry it on a high temperature setting until it’s completely dry. If you usually do your laundry at a laundromat, please ask a family member or close friend that is not in your immediate household to wash your laundry on your behalf. It is important that you stay home as much as possible, unless you are leaving your home for medical care.

Clean hard surfaces such as taps, counters, doorknobs, light switches, telephones and railings with a disinfectant or bleach solution multiple times per day. Note that cleaning physically removes, rather than kills, viruses and bacteria. First clean with water, detergent, and steady friction from a washcloth or rag. Then disinfection after cleaning to kill viruses and bacteria. Use disinfectant solution only on objects, never on the human body.

ITEMS TO HAVE ON HAND

- Non-perishable food items, such as canned or frozen soups, juices, fruits and vegetables, canned fish, crackers, and peanut butter
- Household cleaning supplies, such as bleach or disinfectant, dishwashing soap and paper towels
- Personal hygiene products such as soap, hand sanitizer, shampoo and toilet paper
- A fever thermometer and over-the-counter fever medications, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen
- Prescription medications
FOOD AND SHOPPING

Eating a variety of foods including traditional foods, fruits, vegetables, proteins and whole grains helps support your immune system and your mental and emotional wellness. Even though COVID-19 is not spread by eating food contaminated with the virus, be sure to wash your hands before preparing and eating food.

Grocery shopping tips:

- Choose a “designated shopper,” i.e., one person in your household who is safely able to do the grocery shopping
- Make a meal plan and a shopping list
- Plan to buy enough food to last 1-2 weeks for your household
- Choose fruits and vegetables that last longer in the refrigerator or are frozen easily
- Freezing milk works well and is safe, allowing you to buy larger quantities without worrying about the milk spoiling
- While at the store, avoid touching items you probably won't buy
LOOKING AFTER LOVED ONES

- Providing supportive care to loved ones who are sick at home includes helping them to rest, drink plenty of fluids, and use a pain reliever for fever and body aches.
- If you are providing direct care to someone who is sick, avoid visiting other people.
- If possible, have only one person care for those who are sick to limit the number of people exposed.
- If you can, find a person who can be your “buddy” so that if you get sick, your buddy can go to the pharmacy or store for you – and you can be someone else’s buddy too.
- You can use technology such as phone and video calls to keep in touch with friends, family members and others in your community or neighbourhood.
- You can offer to get groceries and run errands for people who are sick or are at higher risk of getting serious complications if they become sick.
- Keep emergency phone numbers in a place where everyone in the household can find them.

MEDICATION

Anti-fever medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) can help ease the symptoms of COVID-19. If you need medication, use a pharmacy delivery service or ask a friend or family member that is not in your bubble to pick up your medication and bring it to your home. Call your pharmacy ahead of time to ask about options. Temporary coverage for over-the-counter drugs for pain and fever are available through Health Benefits, as is mileage for medication pickup. Details are in the FNHA Health Benefits Available section on page 11.

WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL CARE

If your symptoms are mild and you live in a rural or remote area, it is possible to move closer to an equipped medical facility so that you can more easily access health care if you need to. If your symptoms are severe, such as shortness of breath, chest pain or if a fever continues more than three days despite taking anti-fever medication, call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest Emergency Department. Call ahead before you get medical care. By calling ahead, you help the clinic, hospital, lab or doctor’s office prepare for your visit and stop the spread of germs.
MEDICAL SUPPORT

FIRST NATIONS VIRTUAL DOCTOR OF THE DAY

You may not have easy access to a primary care health provider due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day program enables BC First Nations individuals to make virtual appointments with a doctor. The program supports First Nations people and their family members who live on-reserve or away-from-home (off-reserve) and who have limited or no access to their family doctor. The First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day program includes doctors of Indigenous ancestry and all doctors follow the principles and practices of cultural safety and humility.

If you do not have a doctor of your own or if you have lost access to your doctor due to the COVID-19 pandemic, call 1-855-344-3800 to book an appointment. Medical office assistants are available to help you seven days per week from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

FIRST NATIONS VIRTUAL SUBSTANCE USE AND PSYCHIATRY SERVICE

This service provides individuals with access to specialists in addictions medicine and psychiatry. It is a referral-based service and is available at no cost to all BC First Nations people and their family members, even if those family members are not Indigenous. Specialists are dedicated to the principles and practices of cultural safety and humility, and to delivering trauma-informed care. Learn more here.

FNHA HEALTH BENEFITS AVAILABLE

Medical Transportation Benefits to Support Self-isolation

If you need to self-isolate or have tested positive for COVID-19, Medical Transportation benefits may be available to assist you. You may be eligible for isolation support if you meet one or more of the following conditions:

- Are returning to Canada from international travel including the United States;
- Are confirmed as having COVID-19 or have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19;
- Are returning to community from a high-risk location or environment including work camps, care facilities, or communities experiencing an outbreak;
- Belong to vulnerable population groups (identified on next page) that would have difficulties self-isolating due to issues with transportation, food delivery, medical requirements, or where COVID-19 is present in the community;
- Have symptoms of COVID-19 but no confirmed testing; or
- Have a positive COVID-19 test and live more than 2 hours from a hospital.
The FNHA Health Benefits program will provide Medical Transportation Benefits to the following groups:

- Elders (60+);
- People with pre-existing chronic conditions (such as cancer, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, asthma, renal disease, heart disease);
- People with compromised immune systems due to disease or treatment (i.e., treatment of cancer or organ transplantation, with the associated increased range of chronic illnesses and inflammatory conditions);
- Children under 5 years of age and infants; and
- Pregnant women

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and were told to recover at home, your household members may be eligible to access Medical Transportation benefits to stay elsewhere.

The FNHA Health Benefits Isolation Support team can help you with accommodation, travel and meals if you need to self-isolate. To find out if you are eligible or if you have any self-isolation transportation questions, please call **1-888-305-1505** between 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. seven days per week.

**Temporary Mileage Coverage for Medication Pickup**

The FNHA is supporting communities to coordinate medication delivery and pickup for all community members. If your community is not coordinating medication delivery and pickup or if your pharmacy is unable to deliver medications, you may be eligible for temporary mileage coverage to pick up your medication. Contact your patient travel clerk or call Health Benefits at **1-855-550-5454** to see if you are eligible for mileage coverage.

**Over-the-Counter Drugs for Pain and Fever are Temporarily Available**

To encourage physical distancing and reduce the number of doctor’s visits, pharmacists can now temporarily dispense pain and fever over-the-counter medications without a prescription. Acetaminophen, ibuprofen, naproxen and acetylsalicylic acid products are now temporarily included on Plan W’s pharmacist-initiated treatment list.
Aboriginal Patient Navigators
Aboriginal Patient Navigators (APNs) connect with Aboriginal patients and family members, health care professionals, and other service providers in your region to ensure Aboriginal patients receive culturally safe, appropriate and timely care, whether in hospital or in community. Note that APNs are also referred to as Aboriginal Patient Liaisons or Aboriginal Liaison Nurses, depending on the region in which you live.

FRASER SALISH REGION:
- If you live in Surrey, Delta, White Rock, Langley and Tsawwassen, call the Aboriginal Mental Health Liaison at 604-953-4900 ext. 763041
- If you live in Mission, call the Aboriginal Mental Health Case Manager at 604-814-5642

INTERIOR REGION:
- This webpage provides a detailed list of APNs and contact information based on where you live in the Interior: https://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/AboriginalHealth/Partnerships/Documents/APN_Report.pdf
- Main telephone number: 250-469-7070

NORTHERN REGION:
- This webpage provides a detailed list of Aboriginal Patient Liaisons and contact information based on where you live in the North: https://www.indigenoushealthnh.ca/initiatives/APLs
- Main telephone number: 250-649-7226

VANCOUVER ISLAND REGION:
- This webpage provides a detailed list of Aboriginal Liaison Nurses and contact information based on where you live on Vancouver Island: https://www.islandhealth.ca/our-services/aboriginal-health-services/aboriginal-liaison-nurses
- Main telephone number: 1-877-370-8699 (toll-free)

VANCOUVER COASTAL REGION:
- Call 1-877-875-1131 (toll-free)
- More information: http://www.vch.ca/Locations-Services/result?res_id=771
MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS SUPPORTS

Feeling worried during a crisis is quite 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.

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.

Health Benefits administers coverage for mental health counselling through three programs:

1. Mental Wellness and Counselling;
2. The Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program; and

Counselling appointments are available for in-person or virtual sessions conducted by phone or video conferencing (e.g., Zoom, Skype or FaceTime).

Contact your mental health provider to see if you can schedule a counselling appointment. When you talk to your provider, you should discuss what option they like and also explain what you feel the most comfortable with.

As long as you are seeing a mental health provider who is registered with Health Benefits, all sessions are fully covered.

To learn more about these benefits or to find a registered mental health provider, call: 1-855-550-5454 or visit https://www.fnha.ca/benefits/mental-health
Here are some mental wellness and cultural supports available to you:

- Mental Health and Cultural Supports
  (resource list)

- Staying Connected during the Pandemic
  (fact sheet)

- Impacts of the Pandemic on Mental Health and Wellness
  (article)

- Coping with COVID-19
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDD6kKTEDp0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDD6kKTEDp0)
  (video)

- The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health and Wellness
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swGXDmJOMIM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swGXDmJOMIM)
  (video)

- Coping with Domestic Violence
  (article)

All documents and links above are located on the FNHA.CA coronavirus webpage for BC First Nations Individuals ([https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/communicable-disease-control/coronavirus/public](https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/communicable-disease-control/coronavirus/public)).
RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

- First Nations Health Authority
- BC Centre for Disease Control
- COVID-19 Resources available for all BC First Nations Individuals (status and non-status)
- Food Security for BC First Nations Communities
- COVID-19 Updates from Indigenous Services Canada
- Quick Guide for Individuals: COVID-19 Response Plan

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE FOR SELF-ISOLATION SUPPORT?
To find out about self-isolation supports that you may be eligible for, call 1-888-305-1505 between 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. seven days per week and the FNHA Health Benefits Isolation Support team can help you.

ASK YOUR LOCAL FNHA COMMUNITY RELATIONS REPRESENTATIVE
Community relations representatives have a deep knowledge of FNHA’s Health Benefits program. If you have any questions related to Health Benefits, call the community relations representative in your region:

- **Fraser Salish region**: James Delorme  
  Tel: 778-684-1886 or Email: james.delorme@fnha.ca
- **Interior region**: Joyce Kenoras  
  Tel: 250-318-6634 or Email: joyce.kenoras@fnha.ca
- **Northern region**: Lindsey Larsen  
  Tel: 250-960-9201 or Email: lindsey.larsen@fnha.ca
- **Vancouver Coastal region**: Jenny Smith  
  Tel: 604-785-6955 or Email: jennifer.smith@fnha.ca
- **Vancouver Island region**: Candy-Lea Chickite  
  Tel: 250-830-7346 or Email: lea.chickite@fnha.ca