Safe Services Planning Guide

March 2022

Please contact COVID19needs@fnha.ca with any questions about available supports and resources mentioned in this guide.

Contents

Introduction

This document is intended to provide guidance in support of safe community operations during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. It includes topic-based information and links to the latest resources available related to vaccine programs, public health guidance and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), federal and provincial supports.

This guide is based on the recommendations of the British Columbia (BC) Office of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO), the BC Ministry of Health (MOH), Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), WorkSafeBC and Regional Health Authorities (RHA). Information presented in this guide is intended to support discussions and decision-making at a community and Nation-level, recognizing the inherent self-determination and decision-making of BC First Nations and the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all approach that will meet the realities of all lived experiences and circumstances.

As the pandemic continues to unfold, there may be changes and updates to public health guidelines related to the delivery of safe community operations and services. This document will be reviewed and updated regularly.

Communicable Diseases Emergency (CDE) response planning provides communities with important tools to navigate communicable disease emergency events. For details, see **Community Communicable Disease Emergency Response Planning** in this guide.

Principles

The guidance is aligned with the FNHA's 7 Directives and Shared Values, which underpin FNHA pandemic response activities and decision-making:

- **Cultural safety and humility:** First Nations people access and deliver health care services from multiple sources in the province. Cultural safety and humility is a foundational protocol for health care professionals and health organizations to follow in relationships with First Nations. Creating a culturally-safe service resumption plan for First Nations requires changes at all levels in the system and understanding of a First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness.
- **Culture:** Decisions are guided by cultural teachings and by science and evidence. Decisions to ease or reinstate measures should draw upon the diverse and unique cultures, ceremonies, customs and teachings of First Nations people and trusted health professionals for strength, wisdom and guidance.
- **Collaboration and building relationships:** Strong collaboration with our partners is key to ongoing success. We believe that effective working relationships among our communities and with our partners are a foundation for achieving health and wellness.
- **Respect and flexibility:** Decisions need to respect and be flexible to community needs and risks, noting that these needs and risks will change over time. This includes information on risks of disease and its impacts on health and wellness, as well as social and economic livelihoods. There will be differences between communities, Nations and regions on approaches taken. Measures may need to be re-imposed if the understanding of the risks to health and wellness changes.
- **Fairness and transparency:** Sharing of information and data that protects personal privacy and does not lead to stigma is critical and essential to informing efforts to re-open communities.

Vaccines

Importance of Vaccines

- **Visit [COVID-19 vaccines](#) and [Talk to a Doc](#)**

Vaccines help a person's body to develop an immune response to a specific disease such as COVID-19. Vaccines enable your immune system to get ready to protect against an infectious disease without making you sick. With the COVID-19 vaccines, you are much less likely to experience severe illness, hospitalization or death if you are infected by the virus.

The more people in a community who are vaccinated, the harder it is for the virus to spread and mutate. This is called "herd immunity" or "community immunity."

Reduced access to stable housing, income, clean water and culturally-safe health and social services place some Indigenous peoples at higher risk of COVID-19. The vaccine is one way that Indigenous people can protect themselves from this virus.

The FNHA's Medical Officers strongly recommend that First Nations people opt to get the vaccine.

Those who have had COVID-19 in the past also benefit from the protection provided by vaccination, as recommended by the PHO.

Community Vaccination Clinics

- **For more information on community vaccination clinics, contact your FNHA Regional Community Engagement Coordinator or email covid19needs@fnha.ca**

We encourage communities to work with their local health authorities and the FNHA in support of access to vaccinations.

The FNHA is working to support communities to access COVID-19 vaccines and booster doses, as well as pediatric vaccinations, including through community-based vaccine clinics.

Available supports include additional human resources (administrative support, immunizer support), transportation to or from clinics, rental or purchase of materials for clinics (e.g. tents, traffic safety materials) and support staff at vaccination sites (e.g. security, child care, mental health, traditional wellness).

Clinical vaccination support is also available to nursing and other health staff through the release of nursing guidance documents and community-facing posters and infographics as well as directly through one-to-one conversations and webinars.

Community Vaccine Policies and Requirements

- **Visit [COVID-19 information for community leaders](#), which includes customizable templates**

Several jurisdictions across Canada have implemented programs requiring people to demonstrate proof of their COVID-19 vaccination status in order to access non-essential services or activities. Many public and private employers of all sizes are also voluntarily establishing COVID-19 vaccination requirements to keep their employees and the people they serve safe in the workplace.

Jurisdictions or organizations may choose to implement, change or lift vaccination requirement programs throughout the pandemic depending on changes to the risk-level of COVID-19 transmission.

First Nations communities have the authority to implement vaccination requirement policies for community members, staff and visitors.

On December 7, 2021 the Government of Canada announced its intention to introduce regulations that will require employers in the federally-regulated sector to obtain confirmation that their employees are fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Indigenous governing bodies, including First Nation band councils, will be exempt from the new requirement, thereby respecting their decisions around the introduction of vaccination requirements in the workplace.

The FNHA has amended its policies to require vaccination against COVID-19 for all FNHA staff including all employees, contractors and volunteers in community-facing roles as well as administrative and non-community facing employees (in alignment with the PHO order issued on October 14, 2021).

Testing

- **Information on COVID-19 testing and COVID-19 rapid (at-home) testing**

Testing can determine if you have COVID-19. While vaccination is critical to prevent COVID-19, testing is an important measure to help reduce the spread of the virus.

There are two types of tests available: PCR tests and rapid tests. PCR tests are conducted by trained health care providers. Results are generally analyzed in a lab. Rapid tests (called rapid antigen tests) can be conducted at home and provide quick results – generally within 15 to 30 minutes.

The FNHA is supporting First Nations community access to COVID-19 testing for people who have symptoms and is training local health professionals and community members on how to use testing equipment. The FNHA is doing this through both community-based testing and the distribution of rapid tests.

The FNHA is receiving rapid self-tests from Canada and the province and is distributing these to community health centres through our regional offices. Please contact your Community Engagement Coordinator or local health authority for up-to-date information on accessing testing.

Supporting Public Health Measures

Public Health Guidelines

- **For more information on public health guidance, visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) and Province of BC COVID-19 websites**

Community transmission of COVID-19 continues in many areas across Canada, with variants of concern still circulating. This is why it is important to consistently follow the latest public health guidance regardless of your vaccination status. Getting vaccinated and following public health guidelines is the most effective way to protect our families, our communities and ourselves against COVID-19.

Measures may vary between regions and communities based on community risk assessments.
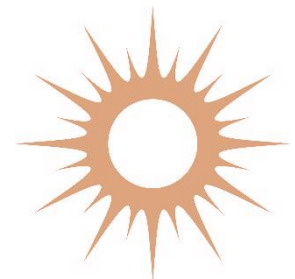
Development of a community communications plan can help engage and raise awareness among community members about their roles in reducing the risk of COVID-19 and protecting members who may be at higher risk. Consider empowering community champions and including them in support for community communications and planning.

Public Health Orders

- **For more information visit province-wide restrictions related to COVID-19**

Public health orders are determined by health officials in BC and provide additional measures deemed necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19 and risk of illness in communities.

A change in public health orders can inform communities as they plan for their unique community needs and self-determined approach. A community may choose to continue public health protocols beyond the timelines set out by the PHO.

In addition to following the public health orders given on the provincial website (see the link above), it is important to get vaccinated and follow the most recent public health guidelines – even after getting the vaccine.

Self-Isolation and Quarantine

- **See the FNHA COVID-19 Community Support Guide and BCCDC guide to self-isolation and self-monitoring**
- **For more information or to request support contact COVID19needs@fnha.ca**

The ability for people to self-isolate when suspected or confirmed of having COVID-19 is critical to preventing further spread of COVID-19. Isolating can be more difficult for people and communities where inadequate housing conditions exist. Some housing conditions also contribute to a higher transmissibility of the virus in the household. In planning for safe service delivery, consider the capacity in the community to safely self-isolate if an outbreak occurs.

- **For the latest information on available supports, including funding to support the purchase of community-based self-isolation infrastructure, refer to the FNHA COVID-19 Community Support Guide**

Considerations for Re-Opening and Maintaining Operations during the Pandemic

Community operations and service settings, including health facilities and leased office locations, need to develop safety measures for service resumption and operations that meet occupational health and safety requirements and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) best practices. The goal is to adapt to operating in a COVID-19 environment and not to return to the pre-COVID-19 work environment. Key objectives for safe operation:

- Keep COVID-19 transmission as low as possible during service resumption.
- Support a phased approach over weeks and months if resuming health services and programs for First Nations communities.

- Incorporate and comply with external authorities where applicable, including WorkSafeBC and Infection Prevention and Control regulations and other applicable laws, regulations and policies.

IPC across Service Settings
- **For FNHA IPC program support, contact ipc@fnha.ca**
- **For more information on specific public health guidance across workplaces and settings, visit BC Centre for Disease Control guidance**

Community operations and services should implement appropriate measures and strategies in IPC to promote the safety of clients, staff and the environment against communicable diseases.

Community health leadership is welcome to consult with the FNHA IPC Program for community-specific recommendations regarding service delivery and infrastructure.

The FNHA IPC Program is also available to support community occupational health and safety teams regarding the development of operating procedures and standards.

Indicators to Support Decision-making
The following are examples of indicators a community may consider when making decisions related to resuming or maintaining the operation of community programs and services[1]:

- BC's PHO has recommended moving to the next phase of relaxation of public health orders and guidelines.
- COVID-19 transmission is controlled to a manageable level (community-level, regionally).
- Sufficient vaccination and public health capacities are in place (e.g. high community vaccination levels, testing capacity, ability for individuals to isolate when necessary).
- Workplace preventative measures are established (e.g., consideration of ability of services and industries to follow public health orders and guidance, including communicable disease prevention plans and COVID-19 safety plans).
- A community communications strategy is in place (consider targeted safety messaging for Elders and youth, translation of materials and various media forms such as community meetings, print, web and social media). Sample materials for reference or dissemination include materials from the FNHA website, BCCDC website and provincial government website.
- Consideration of community approach to vaccine requirements (e.g., within child care settings, community visitors).

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[1] Public health officials across the country have worked on defining a core set of criteria to guide decision-making on when and how to transition between measures. The criteria given in this section is an example informed through Public Health Agency of Canada and Indigenous Services Canada. For each of the criteria given, analysis of a range of inter-related data and evidence allows us to determine if a change in measures may be warranted.

Employee Safety: Health and Safety Requirements as an Employer

BC Health and Safety Plan Requirements

- **For the latest information on employer health and safety plan requirements visit COVID-19 Prevention on WorkSafeBC**

Employers are expected to take reasonable steps to manage health and safety in their workplaces, including preventing communicable disease transmission. Requirements for workplace health and safety planning are determined by the province of BC.

Requirements have changed throughout the pandemic and can change in response to elevated levels of risk. Keeping updated on the latest guidance from the PHO can ensure workplace plans follow the necessary requirements.

The learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic can support a pathway forward to safety and prevention. COVID-19 safety plans that have been required by the province can inform development and updating of communicable disease prevention plans that will be in use beyond the pandemic.

Workplace Regulations

- **For more information on WorkSafeBC and provincial workplace regulations, visit WorkSafeBC's COVID-19 webpage**
- **For more information on federal workplace regulations, visit Workplace health and safety on Canada.ca**

WorkSafeBC is the Province of BC's occupational health and safety (OHS) legislated agency.

WorkSafeBC regulations apply to the FNHA as well as those First Nations that have registered their community services and workers with WorkSafeBC and pay the monthly premiums.

For BC First Nations not registered with WorkSafeBC, the Canada Labour Code and associated regulations regulates First Nations Band Councils, including industries and workplaces on reserve (see Parts I, II and III of the Code). Regulations are administered by the Labour Program of Employment and Social Development Canada. Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (SOR/86-304) set out all workplace safety regulations and requirements.

Alternative Operating Models as an Employer

At times throughout the pandemic, the PHO had requested employers to optimize remote working arrangements in order to reduce workplace transmission. Work from home arrangements emerged as one of the effective strategies in response to COVID-19.

Retaining the capacity for work-from-home can help support workplace wellness by ensuring workers do not attend the office when unwell and also supports the mental health and wellbeing of employees through enhanced life-work balance.

As part of a communicable disease prevention plan, remote work is a scalable option that can enable organizations to redeploy workers to home offices should a future public health emergency require it or if reduced occupancy of the main work premises is recommended.

When establishing evergreen remote working arrangements, employers will want to document their flex work terms and conditions into policies and include flex work location particulars in OHS programming.

Under OHS regulations, the home office is an extension of the workplace. Therefore, employers will need to formalize health and safety requirements of the remote working location and ensure that staff are aware of the shared responsibility for maintaining a healthy and safe home working environment.

Mental Health and Cultural Supports

- **For a list of mental health and cultural supports, see Mental Health and Cultural Supports during COVID-19**

Living through a pandemic is stressful and it is normal for individuals to feel worried or anxious. Measures that can help protect us from the virus can also impact other aspects of our health and wellbeing in unintended ways. As the public health measures start easing, some people may also experience anxiety and stress.

For many, the pandemic has compounded intergenerational and contemporary trauma as a result of colonialism as well as impacts from the concurrent toxic drug crisis and recent events, including findings at former residential schools and environmental emergencies such as wildfires and flooding.

Mental health and cultural supports are available. These include 24/7 crisis lines, clinical counselling supports through First Nations Health Benefits and supports through the First Nations Indian Residential School Resolution Health Support Program.

- **The FNHA has produced a series of videos and fact sheets designed to help individuals support their mental health and wellness during this difficult time; see COVID-19 Mental Health and Wellness**

Additional COVID-19 Response and Recovery Supports

- **See the FNHA COVID-19 Community Support Guide for a list of available FNHA COVID-19 supports (funding and reimbursements)**

The FNHA recommends a conversation with your FNHA regional team to ensure alignment with the funding parameters given to the FNHA from federal and provincial partners. Please contact COVID19needs@fnha.ca with any questions about funding eligibility.

As a partner in health and wellness, the FNHA continues to work with communities to identify COVID-19 needs and offer supports and services to address those needs. These include:

- CDE planning
- personal protective equipment (PPE)
- isolation support for communities and individuals
- health human resources surge capacity
- mental health and cultural supports

For more information on supports provided by our provincial and federal partners visit BC's response to COVID-19 and Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC's) Indigenous Community Support Fund.

Community Communicable Disease Emergency Response Planning

- **If your community would like support in developing or updating a CDE Response Plan, please contact cdmgmt@fnha.ca.**
- **For the FNHA CDE planning resource page, see Communicable Disease Emergency Response Planning**

Many topics included in this guide are components of a community CDE Response Plan.

CDE response planning provides the framework for communities to navigate communicable disease emergency events.

Communities receive regular funding for CDE Planning.

Summary

The FNHA acknowledges the significant work and collaboration undertaken by First Nations across BC in response to COVID-19. These response efforts, adherence to public health measures and supporting access to the COVID-19 vaccine have allowed for the gradual re-opening of communities and services across the province.

We also acknowledge the challenges and impacts of the pandemic on the health and wellness of individuals, families, communities and Nations.

Let's continue to work together and support each other to stay the course as we learn to live with COVID-19.