

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release

March 13, 2020

FNLC Urges Coordinated and Joint Action in Dealing with COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic

(xw̓m̓əθkw̓əy̓ əm (Musqueam), s̓kw̓x̓ wú7mesh (Squamish) and sə́l ilwətaʔt̓/sə́l ilwítulh (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, BC – Mar.13, 2020): The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) urges the federal and provincial governments and First Nations to take every precaution and prepare for the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that has spread throughout the world and Canada.

First Nations populations are particularly vulnerable due to their systemic health, social, and economic marginalization. The FNLC calls on the provincial and federal governments to clearly allocate resources to First Nations communities to help prepare for and cope with medical emergency cases. First Nations community leaders are urged to learn about the Coronavirus disease and take time to prepare themselves, their families, and their community members.

“Now is the time to quickly get ready and prepare for the Coronavirus,” stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee. “While most people will recover from the illness, our Elders and community members with underlying medical conditions or compromised immune systems are extremely vulnerable. I urge everyone to learn as much as possible about the disease and take action to slow or prevent the spread of this disease. Our governments have a critical role to play in the coming days and weeks to help keep all of us safe and healthy.”

“We all must work together in a coordinated and proactive effort to stop the spread of this highly communicable disease,” said Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. “All levels of government, including First Nations, must work in collaboration to share accurate and timely information and to encourage all of our community members to heed the advice of health professionals in the days and weeks ahead. We also encourage all of our communities to pay special attention to making sure our elders and vulnerable community members are taken care of during this serious health crisis.”

“The spread of COVID-19 highlights the vulnerability of First Nations communities, particularly our Elders, who may have compromised immune systems and unequal access to comprehensive healthcare services,” stated Grand Chief Stewart Phillip. “In the past, government inaction and systemic under-resourcing in times of crisis have caused First Nations to disproportionately bear the consequences of public health emergencies. I hope our governments will now ensure First Nations have the capacity and adequate resources to protect their communities and their most vulnerable. I urge everyone to adhere to the proper health and travel protocols and advisories, to remain calm and positive, and to support each other.”



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FNLC also cautions everyone to obtain information about COVID-19 (Coronavirus) from reliable sources. Misinformation during this time of crisis can cause confusion, fear, and panic. We also urge measures be adopted such as frequent and thorough handwashing, social distancing, avoiding mass gatherings and crowded areas, and refrain from all unnecessary travel.

The FNLC recommends continuing to refer to the updated guidance available from the [First Nations Health Authority](#), [BC Centre for Disease Control](#). [HealthlinkBC](#) service navigators can help you find health information or health services, or connect you with a nurse, dietitian, or pharmacist. Call 8-1-1 to speak with a navigator anytime of the day or night. If you or someone in your care has chest pains, difficulty breathing, or severe bleeding, it could be a life-threatening emergency. Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number immediately.

OTHER HELPFUL LINKS:

Information on novel coronavirus (COVID-19) - <https://www.fnha.ca/about/news-and-events/news/information-on-novel-coronavirus>

Canadian Government COVID-19 updates - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

Centre for Disease Control and Prevention - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

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