

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Canada Must Implement Clearer, Stronger Measures to Protect First Nations and all Canadians from the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic

(xw̓məθkwəy̓ əm (Musqueam), sk̓w̓x̓ wú7mesh (Squamish) and səl = ilwətaʔ4/sel = ilwítulh (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, BC – Mar.17, 2020): The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) acknowledges the efforts underway in addressing the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19); however, we strongly urge the federal government to escalate its response and implement clearer, stronger, and quicker measures to support vulnerable First Nation and Canadian communities. Given the continuously evolving nature of COVID-19 and the systemic social and economic inequalities that will leave Indigenous populations and other marginalized communities more susceptible to the disease, Canada must immediately move beyond social-distancing measures.

Canada's actions should include: increasing and widely promoting testing for COVID-19 as recommended by the World Health Organization; announcing an Employment Insurance Benefit Plan that is flexible and accessible so that all employees and their families can receive paid, protected sick leave and other income supports; imposing strict screening processes at all airports and ports of entry to ensure healthcare can be provided freely and immediately to all people; closing bars, nightclubs and theatres in order to protect service-industry workers; transitioning dine-in restaurants to pick-up and delivery only; and developing and implementing outbreak plans for vulnerable populations and communities.

"We must act now in a collective fashion to ensure that the most vulnerable - the elderly, the immunosuppressed and others, are protected from this rapidly spreading virus. In addition to measures such as social distancing, hand washing, avoiding touching our faces and banning gatherings over 50 people, we must now move to take immediate action to close schools and urge governments to take stronger measures at our borders," stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations.

"Every possible government action must be decisively taken to lower the transmission curve of this devastating pandemic. Governments must prioritize human life over economic loss," said Cheryl Casimer of the First Nations Summit. "We must collectively work together at all levels of government to ensure accurate, timely and concise information and briefings, and necessary financial resourcing, are available to all BC First Nations as they respond to the impacts of COVID-19."



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“With the COVID-19 health emergency comes the urgency of alleviating the burdens placed upon Indigenous and vulnerable communities who must confront systemic under-resourcing and barriers to healthcare on a daily basis,” advised Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “Now is not the time for government inaction and hollow promises. We call upon Canada to hold true to its commitment of providing needs-based funding to First Nation communities, and to work much harder and more transparently to help isolated and disadvantaged populations, particularly those without safe housing. When we look at the Downtown Eastside and the community of people living in Oppenheimer Park who do not have the privilege of being able to self-isolate, it is evident that there must be the funding and resources in place from all levels of government to properly screen, test, and support them.”

The FNLC recognizes and thanks healthcare workers for their commitment and sacrifices on the front line and acknowledges all those who are providing support services to our communities.

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/publichealth/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

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