



FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY EVENTS AND GATHERINGS

A Public Health Guidance to Risk Mitigation

June 29, 2020



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BACKGROUND

As the [Re-Open Saskatchewan plan](#) continues to unfold, it is important to note that the risk of COVID-19 in the north is currently high given the ongoing outbreaks in certain communities. The re-open plan does not mean the COVID-19 pandemic is over. This plan does however consist of five-phases outlining how the Province will slowly lift restrictions on businesses and services. These restrictions will be lifted when the public health evidence of transmission risk and other factors suggest it is safe to do so. **This plan does NOT mean a transition to “business as usual,” for all residents of Saskatchewan including First Nations. It signals a transition to a “new normal” where testing, contact tracing, infection control and physical distancing will be MORE important.**

Each community will have their own approach to finding that balance and re-defining ways to achieve a “new normal.” Our current reality may also mean re-applying greater restrictions at times to prevent or address outbreaks. Leadership in the communities will know the best time and the best way to de-escalate existing public health measures such as travel restrictions and business closures. The Northern Inter Tribal Health Authority (NITHA) is committed to working with you and your health teams to provide public health intelligence to enable you to make informed decisions.

As we enter the summer season, many communities may be starting to consider hosting gatherings, traditional ceremonies and events such as Pow Wows, Treaty Days, Weddings, Conferences, Sports, Elections and Fishing Derbies. In the context of this guideline document, mass gathering refers to where many people are together in one place, at one time, for a set period. In anticipation of these events, the following guidance is being provided for people planning, or attending these public events.

Mass gatherings and large community events bring people from multiple communities into close contact with each other and these have the potential to increase COVID-19 transmission. One method to slow the spread of respiratory virus infections, including COVID-19, is by increasing physical distancing i.e. reducing close contact. There is a need for communities and event planners to work collaboratively with NITHA public health officials ahead of time, apply a risk-based approach, and provide guidance on how best such events could be conducted in a safe way. Each and every one of us contributes an important role in keeping ourselves, our families, communities and loved ones healthy.

Over the past few weeks, we have had wide consultations with relevant stakeholders in regards to Indigenous ceremonies in the context of COVID-19. We have advocated that a non-colonial approach be taken to ensure these ceremonies are supported and not prohibited. It is our hope that your communities will complement our effort in this regard.

MEASURES IN PLACE DURING ALL 5 PHASES

As the province gradually lifts restrictions, the following recommendations should be in place for all 5 phases:

- Physical distancing (2 meters or 6 feet apart) must be maintained.
- People must stay at home when they are sick.
- Vulnerable individuals, such as seniors and those with underlying health conditions, must continue to exercise caution and minimize high-risk exposures, such as public outings.
- Enhanced handwashing etiquette with soap or hand sanitizer must be followed.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection for workplaces, public spaces as well as recreational facilities.
- Ensure staff members of long-term care and personal care facilities work in only one facility.
- The public health orders will gradually reduce the number of businesses and workplaces who must be closed or adhere to the person capacity limits in the different phases.

Workplaces should at all times follow enhance public health measures, including:

- physical distancing for staff and clients
- regular cleaning and disinfection
- frequent handwashing etiquette and sanitizing
- use of PPE as appropriate; and
- staff who demonstrate or report COVID-19 symptoms must be kept out of the workplace

PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE

This document will provide guidance on how First Nations community gatherings/events and ceremonies could be conducted in a safe way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Specific goals are to:

- 1) Protect people attending and working at mass gatherings and the local community from COVID-19 infection; and
- 2) Reduce community transmission and introduction of COVID-19 into communities previously without the infection.

All community members should practice physical distancing and avoid attending mass gatherings. If possible, we recommend postponing ceremonies or restricting the number of attendees so that physical distancing can be maintained. However, we realize cultural practices and traditions do not always allow for the postponement of such ceremonies. It is the decision of the community's leadership in collaboration with established community based pandemic response teams/committees on whether to host a traditional ceremony. If you plan to continue with a community event such as a ceremony or gathering, please abide by the Public Health Order/s that are strictly enforced by the RCMP.

Risk Mitigation considerations for event organizers during COVID-19

All planners and organizers of gatherings/events, regardless of their purposes and sizes, have an inherent responsibility to assess the risks associated with hosting their gatherings/events and their ability to mitigate risks. Public health measures taken by planners and organizers of gatherings/events are part of our collective approach to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19. Organizers of larger gatherings/events, as well as events lasting several days, should collaborate with public health authorities, relevant ministries, and Indigenous community governance structures to consider the potential impact of their gatherings/events on the community's healthcare and public health systems. In doing so, they should consider the ability of those systems to manage additional potential COVID-19 cases that may emerge because of the gatherings/events. The following should be taken into consideration:

1. Location/venue of the event

- a) Hold gatherings/events outside whenever possible (ensuring physical distancing is maintained) and consider how to accommodate if inclement weather suddenly arises (e.g. plan for an alternative safe indoor space, or cancelling the gathering/event if it cannot be safely moved indoors while maintaining physical distancing). Holding events outdoors will assist in lowering the risks of spreading COVID-19.
- b) Gatherings/events that are spread out over multiple locations/venues, where attendees travel between sites, provide more opportunities for the spread of the virus and are presumed to have a greater risk.
- c) Confined indoor spaces (gyms, place of worship, sweat lodges) are presumed to have a greater risk.
- d) Ensure indoor ventilation systems operate properly (check in with site operator if needed). Open windows when possible and if weather permitting.

2. Limit the number of participants to ensure physical distancing

- a) Keep the number of participants within the gathering limit permitted under the Public Health Order for the corresponding phase of the re-opening plan.. A high number of attendees is presumed to have greater risk.
- b) Determine a maximum number of attendees (and staff) at any one time to maintain physical distancing. Avoid a crowd as it is presumed to have greater risk. Encourage and facilitate virtual participation for those not attending in person, if possible.
- c) Establish a 2-metre separation between attendees (e.g. leave empty seats between attendees, leave space between each household grouping or "social circle/bubble") with the exception for support workers accompanying persons with disabilities.
- d) Create physical barriers between attendees when physical distancing is not possible.
- e) Physical distancing is one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of illness.
- f) Have security guards enforce the limited number of people / distance, if possible.

3. Frequency of participant interaction and duration of the event

- a) *Avoid* close interactions that are within 2 meters of one another. Close interactions are presumed to have greater risk of transmission than interactions at a distance.
- b) Person-to-person spread is more likely with prolonged exposure (close contact) lasting for more than 15 minutes and being less than 2 meters apart.
- c) Stagger arrivals, departures and breaks, where possible, to reduce congestion at points of entrance and exit and in common areas, while respecting observances.
- d) Gatherings/events that last longer and/or require overnight accommodation (either at the setting or in close proximity) present more opportunities for transmission and is presumed to have a greater risk due to increased duration, frequency and intensity of interactions.
- g) Larger gatherings/events pose a greater risk if there is a large number of attendees over an extended period of time. Gatherings/events that last longer present more opportunities for transmission due to increase duration, frequency and intensity of interactions between attendees.

4. Maintain a participant list

- a) Keep lists of attendees and their contact information (e.g. sign in sheet maintained by one person to prevent sharing of communal pens/papers) in a safe and secure manner See Appendix 1. This will enable adequate contact tracing of attendees in the event there is a COVID-19 case. It is also important to remind those who are ill or those with high-risk medical conditions to not attend. Those at higher risk include:
 - People with medical conditions including: Heart disease, Hypertension (high blood pressure), Lung disease, Diabetes, Cancer
 - People with weakened immune systems from a medical condition or treatment, such as chemotherapy
 - Older adults

5. Determine where participants are coming from

- a) If there is known COVID-19 activity in the community, the likelihood that it could be introduced at the gathering/event is higher.
- b) The risk of COVID-19 spread at a gathering/event is presumed to be greater if a higher proportion of attendees are from outside of the community, or where active local transmission is occurring.

6. Screen participants prior to entering the event

- a) Ask attendees if they are ill or have symptoms of COVID-19 before attending or ask attendees to complete the online [Self-Assessment Tool](#) to determine if they have symptoms consistent with those of COVID-19.
- b) Discourage people who are ill from accessing/attending the gathering/event.
- c) Ensure that strict exclusion policies are in place for attendees who are symptomatic, even if symptoms are mild, or have been advised by the public health authority to quarantine (self-isolate) due to exposure.
- d) Encourage attendees to self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 after attending the gathering/event, and to quickly isolate if symptoms develop.

7. Frequency of participant contact with high touch surfaces

- a) COVID-19 can be spread through touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands. A higher frequency of contact with high-touch surfaces (e.g., washrooms, door handles, service counters, electronic equipment, communal items such as religious artifacts, card payment machines) are all presumed to increase risk.
- b) Increase the frequency of cleaning and reduce the number of common surfaces that need to be touched as well as eliminate any shared objects that are not essential for safety of those attending

8. Types of activities at the event

- a) Activities that may increase the potential of droplet spread, such as singing, cheering, laughing, talking, or sharing food or drinks are presumed to have greater risk.
- b) Fishing:
 - i. Passengers in boats do not have to be from the same household, but must maintain as much separation as possible.
 - ii. Shoreline anglers must adhere to a strict two-metre distance between individuals.
 - iii. Fishing off public docks, dams, jetties or marinas is prohibited.
 - iv. Outdoor tables for filleting fish must be set up to maintain a minimum of two metres between tables.
 - v. Users must be instructed to clean up after themselves and facilities must include fish filleting stations in their cleaning and disinfection practices.
 - vi. Filleting shacks should only be occupied by a single group at a time, and physical distancing should be practiced where possible. Temporary filleting stations can be established to promote distancing between groups.
 - vii. Common-use filleting equipment, such as knives, scrub brushes, etc., should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after every use.

9. Food Service at the event

- a) If hospitality is being provided, remember to eliminate self-serve buffet style eating.
- b) Frequent hand hygiene of staff is required.
- c) Payments should be accepted through contactless methods, avoid cash.
- d) Lines must be managed to maintain 2 metres of separation between attendees.
- e) Self-service condiments such as ketchup, mustard, salt, pepper, milk or cream should not be used. Disposable condiments (e.g. single serve packets) should be used instead.

10. Promotion of personal preventive practices (prior and during)

- a) COVID-19 can be spread when personal preventive practices are not consistently followed.
 - Personal preventive practices (e.g., frequent hand hygiene, avoid touching the face, respiratory etiquette, and wearing a nonmedical mask or cloth face covering if physical distancing is not possible to maintain or is unpredictable, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces with approved products).
- b) Provide convenient and increased access to hand hygiene facilities (e.g. by placing hand sanitizer dispensers or hand wash stations in easy to see locations)
- c) Keep attendees informed about public health advice applicable to the gathering/event.

Additional Precautions

If the gathering does proceed, consider whether a policy about attendees and workers wearing masks is required. Wearing a home made facial covering/non-medical mask as an additional measure to protect those around you is a good measure, even if you have no symptoms. Wearing one can be useful for short periods of time, when physical distancing is not possible. Keep in mind this has not been proven to protect the person wearing it and is not a substitute for physical distancing and handwashing. Non-medical facemasks can be used to provide added protection from potentially spreading the virus, but are not intended to replace social distancing or promote mass gatherings.

References:

1. Indoor public community gathering spaces that operate continuously (e.g., recreation facilities such as gyms, libraries, museums, theatres, cinemas): [Risk mitigation tool for workplaces/businesses operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
2. Events for children and youth, or gatherings/events offering childcare on site to facilitate participation of certain attendees: [Risk mitigation tool for child and youth settings operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
3. Outdoor Events: [Risk mitigation tool for outdoor recreation spaces and activities operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
4. Guidance developed for community-based measures titled: [Community-Based Measures to Mitigate the Spread of Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) in Canada](#)
5. World Health Organization. [Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19](#). 7 April 2020. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>
6. CDC. [Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#). March 21, 2020. Available from; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>
7. Key Planning Recommendations for Mass gatherings: [Key planning recommendations for mass gathering/events in the context of the current COVID-19 outbreak](#)
8. Considerations for Events and Gatherings: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>
9. How can event planners, organizers and operators of gathering/events mitigate COVID-19 risks?: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/mass-gatherings-risk-assesment.html#a2>
10. Fishing Access: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus/re-open-saskatchewan-plan/guidelines/parks-and-campground-guidelines>

APPENDIX 1 - PARTICIPANT ATTENDANCE LIST

Participant Attendance List

Name of Event: _____

Date of Event: _____

	Last Name	First Name	Phone Contact	Community of Residence
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Please fax completed list to NITHA Public Health at (306) 953-5020