



Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority Inc.



September 9, 2021

To: All Chiefs and Councils in NITHA Communities

Re: Public Health Recommendations to Mitigate COVID-19 Surge in Cases

COVID-19 continues to be a serious Public Health threat. The spread of the Delta variant has had an impact on the province-wide re-opening. NITHA public health officials are concerned about the COVID-19 situation in First Nation communities across the north, as we head into the fall with a fourth wave driven by the Delta variant which is more than twice as transmissible as previous variants and is causing higher rates of cases and hospitalizations in all age groups including children and young people.

We recognize that it is due to the collective hard work and sacrifices made by community residents, pandemic teams, health teams, Chief & Councils in First Nations communities that we have managed to avoid completely overwhelming our health system and mitigated the worst impacts of the previous waves of the pandemic.

Given the current situation, NITHA public health officials would like you to be aware of the following:

- The COVID-19 pandemic is not over yet and still impacting First Nations communities.
- We know what public health measures work to prevent outbreaks from the past 3 waves, and it is critical that we continue to follow them as we head into the fall:
 - Masking in indoor public spaces
 - Frequent hand hygiene
 - Physical distancing and avoiding crowds
 - If you feel sick or if you are a contact of someone with COVID-19, stay away from others and get tested
- With the Delta variant circulating widely and vaccination acceptance rates in some communities not yet reaching 85% for those aged 12 and older, we need to continue our proactive public health practices. These prevention measures are the best way to protect the vulnerable and unvaccinated.
- Some recent community outbreaks have been fueled by large gatherings where many unimmunized people are in attendance.

The NITHA Medical Health Officer strongly recommends the following measures to mitigate ongoing risk across northern First Nation communities:

1. Mandated masking be reinstated for all indoor public spaces until such time as immunization rates and other control measures bring case numbers and serious complication rates down again.
2. Mandatory immunization for those working with our most vulnerable populations and our children who can't yet be immunized (health care workers, teachers and other school staff, eligible students and daycare staff) and for all Band employees. Widespread availability of vaccines means that we do not need to go back into a "lockdown" situation this time.
3. Proof of immunization against COVID-19 ("vaccine passports") or proof of a recent negative COVID-19 rapid antigen test for access to non-essential services including but not limited to gatherings, social and recreational events. Many other businesses should consider similar policies especially if they serve large numbers of people indoors, or have clientele who are at increased risk of complications from COVID-19. Essential services can use other means to safely provide services to unimmunized clients such as cohorting, masks, physical distancing and hand hygiene.
4. Mandatory isolation of COVID-19 cases and close contacts be reinstated, along with the staffing needed to carry out case investigation and contact tracing and enforcement, and immunization.
5. Develop more capacity for COVID-19 testing, screening and contact tracing needed for the fall surge.
6. Hosting community gatherings and tradition ceremonies in a safe way with strict public health measures in place.

Should you have any questions or more information, please continue to reach out to NITHA. The health and safety of all NITHA communities remain our priority. Stay Vigilant! Stay Safe!

Respectfully,



Dr. Nnamdi Ndubuka

Medical Health Officer, Northern Inter-Tribal Health Authority