

COVID-19 MESSAGE FROM ISC BC REGION

UPDATE #60 / September 3, 2020

Good Afternoon,

We hope you are keeping well and enjoying these last precious days of summer with family and loved ones. September is here and with it comes a new chapter in these unprecedented times. **The B.C. government has formally extended the provincial state of emergency** through the end of the day on Sept. 15, 2020, to allow the provincial government to continue to take the necessary actions to keep people safe and manage immediate concerns, such as recent outbreaks in some areas of the province. Back-to-school planning is top of mind for parents and caregivers, educators and politicians. How to support learning, while keeping children and their families safe, will be a balancing act. We know there is so much at stake in getting it right. In this update we will share some of the supports available for communities with schools and families struggling to cope with the uncertainties introduced by COVID-19. We also want to echo the sentiments of the recent Indigenous Physicians Association Public Service Announcement for COVID-19 - "We see you. We see you making these sacrifices to keep your community safe. We raise our hands to you." For the complete message click the banner below.


Finally, you may have heard of recent cyber-attacks on federal government systems. At this time, no security breach has been confirmed, but the Department is working closely with the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security to review and monitor systems. Please note financial agreements and banking transfers are not impacted; however, some electronic submissions have been impacted as well as access to the Indian Lands Registry System and the Education Information System (EIS). Rest assured we are working on solutions.

For any inquiries concerning the Indian Lands Registry System, please contact aadnc.bclandregistry.aandc@canada.ca.


For any inquiries concerning submitting Education Information System (EIS) reports, please contact Jody Kaden, Director Funding Services at jody.kaden@canada.ca.

For all other questions or concerns please don't hesitate to contact us at aadnc.isbccovid19.aandc@canada.ca.

Your efforts help limit the spread of COVID-19



Please watch this video:
**Indigenous Physicians Association
PSA for COVID-19 – "We see you."**



BACK TO SCHOOL UPDATE

BCTEA School Restart Funding

On July 29, **Rob Fleming, BC Minister of Education announced an investment of \$45.6 million** to help public systems to implement new health and safety measures to support September COVID-19 preparedness for all students attending public schools. Eligible expenses include: hiring additional staff for cleaning schools; purchasing hand-hygiene stations, cleaning supplies, reusable face masks for students and staff; and supporting remote learning through technology loans and software support to students with disabilities or complex needs. Of this, \$3.1 million was dedicated to independent schools.

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In keeping with BCTEA commitments, and to ensure that proportionate funding is distributed to First Nation schools, Indigenous Services Canada is providing \$482 thousand to support First Nation schools in BC. This funding can be used to address the health and safety measures as mentioned above. These allocations will be sent out through the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) in the coming days.

In response to these unprecedented times, **FNESC released an environmental scan on September 1.** For more information, please contact FNESC at info@fnesc.ca.



Safe Return to Class Fund

On August 26, the **Prime Minister announced \$2 billion nationally in funding through the Safe Return to Class Fund.**

Of this, the province of BC will receive \$242.36 million. This funding will support all students attending provincially-run facilities, including 8,000 First Nations students who live on reserve but are attending a public or off-reserve independent school.

An additional \$112 million nationally will support a safe return to elementary and secondary First Nations schools on reserve. The funding will enable communities to take action on First Nation-led plans and preparations for safe school reopening that both follows public health guidance and supports the school community.

The Safe Return to Class fund can be used to support measures related to returning to class as prioritized by Chief and Council. Funding could support the preparation of physical spaces, including the installation of Plexiglas separators and marking floors with physical distance indicators; hiring additional teachers and staff to teach physically-distanced classes, salaries for custodians and bus drivers who may work additional hours to meet public health and safety measures; connectivity and technology (such as laptops); purchase of e-learning software and development of take home

learning activities; transportation; re-tooling teaching spaces (such as physical partitions); deep cleaning and personal protective equipment.

Self-Governing First Nations are eligible for this additional funding in accordance with the provisions of their agreements.

Further details on allocation methodologies will be available in the coming days.

Province Posts Detailed Plans To Support Safe Return To Classroom

Last week the **Province of BC also posted back to school plans for K-12 families for all 60 provincial school districts.** With half of First Nations children attending public schools at some point in their education, we know this is another source of concern for your communities.

"I know that some families will continue to have medical or health concerns, and my expectation is that school districts will be flexible and work with families to provide remote options that keep children connected to their school community," said Rob Fleming, BC Minister of Education.

Minister Fleming has directed school districts to contact all families in their school communities to share their safety plans and to confirm if they are planning for their child to attend school classes in September, or if they need alternative learning options.

Each school district plan follows the same strict provincial health and safety measures co-developed with the provincial health officer, the BC Centre for Disease Control and the Ministry of Education. School districts are adapting their schedules and learning groups to fit within those measures based on student

Federal public health guidance for schools and childcare programs

Please note this guidance is currently being revised however, the basic principles regarding spacing, etc. remain in effect.



population and local consultation with education partners, parents and Indigenous rights holders.

For more information, please visit your local school district website to view your school's health and safety measures and plans.

OTHER UPDATES

Canada announces mental health and wellness supports for Indigenous people

In response to the advocacy of many Indigenous leaders who have pushed for enhanced mental supports, **Minister Marc Miller has announced \$82.5 million to help Indigenous communities adapt and expand mental wellness services.**

It will help partners and communities to adapt mental wellness services to the current COVID-19 context, improving access and addressing growing demand in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes:

- expanding access to culturally appropriate services such as on the land activities, community-based health supports and mental wellness teams;
- adapting mental health services, such as virtual counselling, to meet increased demand; and
- supporting Indigenous partners in developing innovative strategies to address substance use and to improve access to treatment services.

“Community-driven, culturally appropriate and timely mental health supports are critical to promote the well-being for anyone struggling to cope with the added stress and anxiety the COVID-19 pandemic has created,” said Minister Miller.

The First Nations envelope will be allocated based on discussions among regional partnership tables. There will also be some funds remaining to enable surge capacity and adaptation among national organizations and services, such as the **Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, First Peoples Wellness Circle** and **Hope for Wellness Line**.

Hope for Wellness Help Line



The Hope for Wellness Help Line provides immediate, culturally competent, telephone crisis intervention support for all Indigenous Peoples, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can be reached at 1-855-242-3310.

The national toll-free service has expanded its services to include an **online crisis service** to provide a new option for clients, particularly youth who may prefer to access services through the internet, as opposed to over the phone.

Accessing additional public health support for First Nations and Inuit communities during COVID-19

On May 29, 2020, the Government of Canada announced \$285.1 million to support the public health response to COVID-19 in Indigenous communities. This funding supports community-led responses to the pandemic, and provides targeted increases in primary health care resources for First Nations communities. In BC, the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) coordinates most health specific community requests.

The funding is intended for:

- immediate public health measures including those related to minor capital for First Nations schools. For more information on eligible costs, please visit www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1584819394157/1584819418553
- on-reserve students who are attending provincial schools and may need PPE on their journey between their First Nation community and provincial schools.

The funding is not intended for major capital improvements, funding for additional teachers, or technology supports.

FNESC is preparing an application on behalf of BC First Nations.

Canada announces changes to Employment Insurance

In case you missed it, as part of its ongoing COVID-19 response the Government of Canada has announced **changes to the Employment Insurance (EI) program and new income support benefits that will better support all Canadians**. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) will be extended by an additional four weeks to a maximum of 28 weeks.

EI will now be available to more Canadians, including those who would not have qualified for EI in the past, adding more than 400,000 people into the program. Those receiving EI will be eligible for a taxable benefit rate of at least \$400 per week, or \$240 per week for extended parental benefits, and regular benefits will be accessible for a minimum duration of 26 weeks.

Summary of temporary measures to help Canadians access EI benefits more easily

- 120 hours of work required to qualify
- Minimum benefit rate of \$400 per week
- At least 26 weeks of regular benefits

Additionally, Canada will freeze the EI insurance premium rates for two years, so Canadian workers and businesses will not face immediate increases to costs and payroll deductions due to the additional expenses resulting from the pandemic.

Please click on this hyperlink for more information on how the Government of Canada is **Supporting Canadians through the next phase of the economy re-opening: Increased access to EI and recovery benefits**.

CRA opens applications for enhanced Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy

The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) **has opened applications for Period 5 of the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS)** – the first period of the enhanced CEWS program. Program changes for Periods 5-9 include:

- The extension of the CEWS, including redesigned program details, until November 21, 2020.
- Increased eligibility, meaning that all eligible employers who've experienced a revenue drop can now qualify for a base subsidy. The subsidy amount is based on the revenue drop.
- Employers who are especially hard-hit can qualify for a top-up of up to 25%.
- Provide certainty for employers that have already made business decisions for July and August, by ensuring they will not receive a subsidy rate lower than they would have under the previous rules.

Eligible employers can apply for Period 5 of the CEWS through **My Business Account** or through the **CRA's web form application**. New security measures have been added to the My Business Account portal following a recent cyber-attack.

Online Course Provides Guidance on Returning to Work Safely During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) has released an e-course titled **Pandemic Planning: Reopening for Business, to help organizations across Canada safely return to work during the COVID-19 pandemic**.

Topics covered in the course include how coronavirus spreads and its symptoms, employer and worker duties and responsibilities in a COVID-19 return to business plan, methods of control (including cleaning and disinfecting), how to manage the workplace and prepare workers for a safe return, and understanding the impacts of a pandemic on mental health.

The course is available for free on the **CCOHS website**.

USEFUL LINKS

- **Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Indigenous communities** – developed by ISC, this page provides health and financial support information for Indigenous communities.
- Find information on how to apply for financial or economic support from the Government of Canada at: Canada.ca/coronavirus.
- With the help of BCFC, the First Nations Public Service Secretariat has developed **a series of one-pagers on COVID-19 support and resources**.
- **Taking care of your mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic**
- **Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Prevention and risks**
- First Nations Health Authority – **Information for community leaders**
- **COVID-19 BC Support App and Self-Assessment Tool**
The app will let you receive the latest updates, trusted resources, and alerts. The Self-Assessment Tool is built in.
- **Transport Canada – COVID-19 measures, updates, and guidance issued by Transport Canada**

REGIONAL CONTACTS

We've set up a dedicated email for any non-health COVID-19-related questions and requests:
aadnc.isbccovid19.aandc@canada.ca.

