

## COVID-19 – SUPPORTING RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

The health of people living in rural remote communities can be affected by social, environmental and economic factors, such as, housing, water quality or access, food security, pre-existing health conditions, and limited access to health care. These factors are important to consider in lessening the spread and impacts of COVID-19.

Steps that can be taken to alleviate the risk to people living in rural remote communities include:

- Early planning and collaboration with local public health officials is vital. Even in the absence of confirmed cases, communities should prepare for an outbreak and potential rapid spread of COVID-19.
- Promote the following preventative actions:
  - Practice proper handwashing, cough and sneeze etiquette;
  - Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth;
  - Avoid contact with people who are sick;
  - Practice social distancing (2 meters / 2 arms-length);
  - Cancel social gatherings;
  - Avoid having visitors at home (this includes family and friends);
  - Restrict time in public by consolidating trips to get supplies (e.g. groceries and/or medications); and
  - Frequently clean and disinfect high-touch areas such as toilets, bedside tables and door handles with diluted bleach or a regular household cleaner.
- As delivery and transportation of medical and non-medical supplies, such as soap, food and household items, in rural remote communities can be challenging, people should be encouraged to have a backup of supplies to maintain their needs (e.g. medication, soap, household cleaning products, non-perishable food and fluids, tissues).
- When clean water is not available (e.g. during a boil water advisory or when water quality/source is unknown) water should be boiled (e.g. boiling for one minute to a rolling boil and allow to completely cool). To wash hands:
  - Use two separate containers (e.g. container for holding water supply and bowl for washing one's hands);
  - Moving hands around to mimic running water to wet, wash with soap and rinse (additional water may be required for rinsing); and
  - The container used for hand washing should be cleaned and dried after each use.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol can be used for hand hygiene if soap and water is not available. However, if hands are visibly soiled, hand

wipes should be used to remove any such soil or organic material; this should then be followed by the use of the alcohol-based sanitizer.

- Encourage people to stay in touch with family, friends and community groups by telephone, text and/or email. If internet is available, encourage people to video chat with family and friends through online technologies, such as Facebook, FaceTime or Skype.
  
- People may feel overwhelmed and stressed during this time. It is important to remind people that that this is normal and will pass. Promote the following mental health supports:
  - If internet is available, encourage people to visit [www.bridgethegap.ca](http://www.bridgethegap.ca) for many free, local mental health and addictions resources and programs available to people of all ages.
  - For those that maybe feeling isolated and alone, they may speak with a trained mental health peer supporter on the phone at the Provincial CHANNAL Warm Line at 1-855-753-2560 from 9am to 12am daily (Newfoundland time).
  - If a person is unable to cope, the Mental Health Crisis Line is a free, confidential service for individuals, family and friends. The crisis line is province-wide, 24 hours a day and be reached at 709-737-4668 or 1-888-737-4668.
  
- For anyone having issues or concerns regarding self-isolation, please call the Canadian Red Cross COVID-19 help line at 1-800-863-6582, available 8:00am to 8:00pm daily.
  
- If a person is showing symptoms of COVID-19 (two or more of: fever or signs of fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, or headache) they should not visit their family physician's office or local health clinic, and unless it is a medical emergency, they should not go to the Emergency Department. They should stay at home and call 811.
  
- Individuals should use the self-assessment tool on the HealthLine 811 website to determine if they need to call 811: [www.811healthline.ca](http://www.811healthline.ca)
  
- If individuals are not able to access the self-assessment tool, they are advised to call 811.
  
- For the latest information on COVID-19 in Newfoundland and Labrador, please go to the following webpage: [www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19](http://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19)
  
- For those without access to the internet, encourage people to listen to the local news on television or radio for important community updates. Request people to get news from trusted and valid sources.

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