



# Cree Nation Leadership COVID-19 Briefing Public Statement November 17, 2020

## Status of Pandemic

COVID-19 continues to expand worldwide. In Canada, in particular Ontario and Quebec cases do appear to have plateaued in the last few weeks but at alarming high levels that are not sustainable for the Canadian Health care system. Governments are forced to consider the application of ever stricter measures.

In recent weeks there has been very good news confirming that there will be a vaccine, the question is only when. **There are many hurdles to be crossed before a vaccine is available in Eeyou Istchee, but at least the question is no longer if but when.** As the finish line begins to come into sight this will be the most challenging time. Community members are fatigued from all the restrictions, healthcare workers are fatigued from months of struggle and leadership is fatigued from the never-ending logistical challenges to keep our communities functioning.

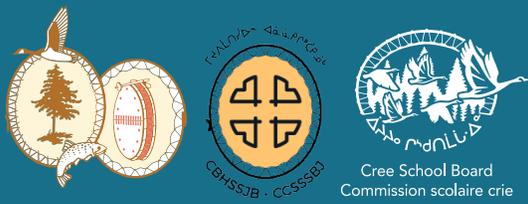
Despite COVID-19 hitting Quebec so hard the Cree Nation has made incredible sacrifices and done remarkably well keeping COVID-19 out of our communities and protecting our most vulnerable community members.

Unfortunately, our neighbors have not done as well lately. The recent outbreaks in Chibougamau and Chapais have demonstrated how rapidly the status of a region can change, especially when people do not take the proper precautions when traveling to high-risk areas. **The outbreaks in Chibougamau and Chapais can be traced back to Region 2 –Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean which has seen 1,603 cases in the last 14 days.** Fortunately, they have dedicated Public Health Authority that worked tirelessly to contact trace and isolate the cases. The workload was so high that local testing capacity was quickly passed, and tests are taking longer because results come from other labs. All Public Health authorities can do now is wait for testing results and monitor Chibougamau and Chapais.

It is hoped that there will be no testing results demonstrating community transmission (transmission inside the community that cannot be traced to a contained outside source) or else the two communities may be declared red zones according to Quebec's risk assessment. This will pose the biggest threat to our communities that we have experienced since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even though people are tired it is more important now than ever, that all of us, as individuals do what we can in keeping COVID-19 out of our communities: respecting travel restrictions, answering honestly to local security officers when passing check points, physical distancing and practicing other pre-cautionary measures.

**The most valuable contribution that people can make is to reduce the size of social circles and the number of social interactions.**



## Testing in Eeyou Istchee

16 cases with 15 recovered, regular testing for COVID-19 in Eeyou Istchee is currently at:

- 1,421 regular tests have been administered
- 1,398 returned negative
- 7 waiting for results

The Cree Health Board continues to make efforts to increase screening capacity doing more screening tests focusing on Health Workers, patients returning home and other high-risk groups such as elder's home workers. The current Screening results are:

- 1,783 screening tests
- 1,769 returned negative
- 14 awaiting results

## Travelling

Northern regions of Ontario and Quebec are doing well generally in keeping COVID-19 cases low and quickly undertaking the contact tracing necessary to shut down the spread once a case is identified.

After evaluation of the **Areas Representing a Risk**, those individuals who have in the last 14 days travelled:

- anywhere outside Quebec, except for the Ontario regions of Porcupine and Timiskaming, which includes the municipalities of Timmins, Moosonee and North Bay;
- within Quebec to:
  - Region 1 – Lower St-Lawrence
  - Region 2 – Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean
  - Region 3 – Quebec Capital
  - Region 4 – Mauricie and Centre du Québec
  - Region 5 – Estrie
  - Region 6 – Montreal
  - Region 7 – Outaouais (Gatineau)
  - Region 9 – North Shore
  - Region 11 – Gaspé and Magdalen Islands
  - Region 12 – Chaudière-Appalaches
  - Region 13 – Laval
  - Region 14 – Lanaudière
  - Region 15 – Laurentians
  - Region 16 – Montérégie
- any Hydro-Quebec site;



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- to any mine site, please note:
  - Workers coming from the Windfall Mining Exploration Site of Osisko Mining Inc with the appropriate documentation will NOT be required to self-isolate;
  - Workers coming from the Renard Mine Site of Stornoway, with the appropriate documentation will NOT be required to self-isolate;
  - Workers coming from the Éléonore Mine Site of Newmont, with the appropriate documentation will NOT be required to self-isolate;
- any forestry camp;

will be required to self-isolate for 14 days under the Local Mandatory Self-Isolation Laws.

**As of November 10th, 2020 @ 1:00PM the Region of Sudbury is considered an Area of Risk.** Therefore, people coming from Regions 8, 10, 17 and 18 in Quebec and the regions of Porcupine, Timiskaming and North Bay in Ontario DO NOT need to self-isolate under the local Mandatory Self-Isolation Laws.

## Managing Health Services

The leadership would like to remind people how important it is to get the regular flu vaccine this year. The more people that get vaccinated will reduce the burden on the local health care system in our communities and anxiety to our families as the symptoms of the flu can resemble very much the symptoms of COVID-19.

In the communities, services continue to be adapted to provide safe medical services and the Cree Health Board is making efforts to introduce more medical specialists into the communities. It will be much safer for Eeyou Istchee to have the critical health specialists come into the communities rather than high numbers of patients travelling to the South. The Specialists are respecting strict screening protocols, supervision and precautionary measures that includes the administration of multiple tests.

**It is important to keep in mind that for the last seven months, the COVID-19 cases in Eeyou Istchee did not come from the medical professionals that come to our communities. It is therefore safe to go to the clinic and meet with specialists in our communities.**

Every effort is being made to preserve and increase the testing capacity of the Cree Health Board so that it can be used for urgently needed medical personnel, emergencies and hopefully to assist in identifying at-risk students during their self-isolation period when returning home from the holidays.

As Southern jurisdictions are doing much worse than anticipated a meeting is being called with Cree School Board and Cree Health Board representatives to identify options so that students can have needed holidays in a way that limits increasing risk to community members. Options will be identified shortly to allow students to plan.



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## Eeyou Istchee Deconfinement Plan

The incredible sacrifice and discipline demonstrated by the Cree Nation over the summer in the development, implementation and compliance with precautionary measures including our local Mandatory Self-Isolation Laws allows us to remain in Phase 4 of the Deconfinement Plan while other jurisdictions have to move into re-confinement:

- No masks for grade 4 and below unless the student, teachers, staff or parents wish to wear a mask;
- Grade 5 and above masks are required in common areas but can be removed once seated.

The cooperation and the respect of physical distancing and precautionary measures has allowed the Cree Nation to protect our Health care capacity and protect community members from COVID-19.

- Activities like weddings, graduations, etc. subject to the gathering size restrictions
- Indoor gatherings (50 people max.)
- Outdoor gatherings (150 people max.)

**As stated above, every effort is being made to develop an adapted self-isolation protocol which could see a reduced self-isolation period of seven (7) days, for Cree School Board students returning home for the Christmas holiday. The hope is to have the protocol ready for November 24th, 2020.**

The Public Health team will continue to provide support to communities and organizations in deciding which services or activities to resume and how to do it safely. Any request for advice regarding the Deconfinement Plan or request for advice on what activities and how they can be carried out during a particular phase of the Deconfinement Plan can continue to be sent to: [18tcr.phcovidteam@ssss.gouv.qc.ca](mailto:18tcr.phcovidteam@ssss.gouv.qc.ca) or [covidrisk@cngov.ca](mailto:covidrisk@cngov.ca).

**The Public Health team is also available to answer questions about risk assessment in situations related to COVID-19. Please call the Infoline at 1-866-855-2811 for support on making decisions about control measures. The PSOs and CMCs can also call the Public Health on-call team for support.**

If you feel like you may need someone to talk to during these challenging times, please contact the Cree Health Board's **Psychosocial Health Line: 1-833-632-4357**. The Cree Health Board would also like to inform people that specialists with a traditional approach to healing are also accessible through the same number.

## Education

The Cree School Board has adopted a new school calendar for this year. **The new calendar extends the Christmas break by a week to accommodate the self-isolation period of staff upon return to the communities after the break.** Staff leaving the communities for the Christmas break on December 18th will return to the communities on January 4th and begin their isolation period. **Students will return to school either online or in-person on January 11th.** Please check [www.eeyoueducation.ca](http://www.eeyoueducation.ca) for the latest official school calendar.

**The Cree leadership is always proud of our students who leave the comfort of their communities and families and head to the South with a view to gaining an education that will allow them to contribute to the growth and strength of our Nation. We are especially proud of them for pursuing this path during this very difficult period.** Most importantly we are very proud of the precautions that our students are taking to protect themselves and their communities as we do not have any indication that students have become a significant source for COVID-19 in our communities.

The Cree School Board is also examining ways of providing additional support that may be needed during these times for post-secondary students considering that they may have dependents who are students themselves or need to care for children during these uncertain times.

## A Special Thank You - Sharon and Phillip Matoush

The leadership would like to take a moment to share about the initiative taken on by Sharon and Philip Matoush to provide Espresso clients with traditional food. Their compassion for patients, some who are in Montreal for long-term care, is an example of what keeps the Cree Nation united and stronger together. Many have expressed their gratitude to Sharon and Philip for feeding not only their bodies, but their minds and souls with good, healthy traditional meals. The leadership of the Cree Nation would also like to thank you, Sharon and Philip, for brightening up their days!

