



April 08, 2020

Mayors or Chiefs

Concerns Related to Compliance with the Public Health Order

The Northwest Territories is facing a challenging time as the Coronavirus (COVID-19) is testing the resolve of all residents. Recognizing that COVID-19 is a sensitive topic at the forefront of everyone's minds, I am writing to start a dialogue around compliance issues with the Chief Public Health Officer's (CPHO) order, including the return of residents to their homes after completing the 14 day self-isolation period in regional centres .

Since March 22, 2020, all residents returning from travel outside the NWT have been required to complete and submit a self-isolation plan. This includes mandatory 14-day self-isolation in one of the four designated centers located in Yellowknife, Hay River, Inuvik, and Fort Smith. The self-isolation plan allows for residents to self-isolate at home if they live in one of those regional centres and are able to do so safely, or at one of the regional facilities set up by the GNWT. Compliance with the CPHO order requires all residents to work collectively to manage the risk.

Regional centres were chosen as self-isolation stations because of the access to medical staff and equipment. Given that all cases of COVID-19 in the territory to date are travel related, the CPHO wanted to ensure that those self-isolating following travel were in an area where they could receive swift treatment should they develop a severe case.

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We know that as leaders you are concerned about the welfare of your residents. We share a common goal of protecting residents, especially during these challenging times. How we enhance safety in communities is a shared concern and responsibility. Restricting access to a community is a serious step which raises a number of public safety and legal considerations. While we understand that there are real concerns and fears in your communities, taking local action that may be outside of your authority could result in an escalation in conflict and risk, which is not what we want to achieve. We need to work together to find options that make communities more secure. In particular, we encourage communities to not take steps to restrict access to communities by establishing checkpoints.

In recent conference calls with both Indigenous and community leaders, we heard clearly the concerns that leaders have with compliance issues. The Government of the NWT is standing up a special unit of officers appointed under the *Public Health Act* to enforce compliance with the CPHO order. In addition, we are reviewing all related legal authorities across a number of Departments to ensure a comprehensive response to compliance concerns. The Government remains committed to supporting the full implementation of any CPHO order.

Today the GNWT announced the establishment of a dedicated Compliance and Enforcement Task Force to enhance compliance with the existing and anticipated future orders. This Task Force includes the appointment of Conrad Baetz as a Deputy Chief Public Health Officer to lead this team. Mr. Baetz brings decades of experience in delivering compliance and enforcement programs in the NWT. The Taskforce membership reflects a whole of government approach including the redeployment of over 35 staff and experienced officers to investigate and enforce

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non-compliance across all 33 communities. The establishment of this team will also provide greater ability to collaborate with communities and other organizations throughout the territory.

In addition to ensuring that compliance measures are increased, I would like to assure community leaders that as part of supporting residents to return to their home community, there are procedures in place to ensure their safety and the safety of other residents. Prior to checking out of a designated isolation centre, individuals will be asked to complete a declaration indicating that they are free of any COVID-19 symptoms prior to their return home. As part of this process individuals may also ask for follow up by their community health care provider.

Should a resident identify symptoms related to COVID-19 during self-isolation, the established practice is that they need to have two confirmed negative tests prior to being released by the GNWT from self-isolation. These procedures are designed to ensure that residents released from self-isolation and who are returning to their home community are healthy and poses no risk to other residents.

NWT residents who have completed their 14 days in isolation without symptoms of COVID19 should be allowed to return to their home community once they have met these requirements. If they are symptom-free, and following their self-isolation plan, they are no greater risk than any other NWT resident.

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In the coming weeks and months we will need to work together to ensure community safety. This means all of us actively discouraging gatherings of any number of people (including parties, card games, dinner parties, funerals) as well as people having visitors in their home or go to other people's homes .

In our upcoming call I would like to discuss ways to ensure everyone is practicing physical distancing. I believe that by working together on this critical issue we can flatten the curve and prevent or minimize cases in communities.

As we stand up our compliance unit it will continue to be important for you, as leaders, and for the public to contact ProtectNWT if violations of the CPHO orders are taking place. Public health officials are on call at 1-833-378-8297 or by email protectnwt@gov.nt.ca, 8 AM to 8 PM, 7 days a week with specific, credible information for investigation.

Now is a time for all Northerners to unite, support one another and follow the advice and directions of health officials and emergency responders. I look forward to continuing to meet with local leaders so that we can address our concerns together.

Sincerely,


Caroline Cochrane

Premier, Minister, Municipal and
Community Affairs

c. Members of the Assembly