



Community Update – June 10

Emerging Wisely Current State: Relaxing Phase 1: First Steps

The full content of the GNWT's press release clarifying Travel Restrictions and Self Isolation

Caroline Cochrane, Premier of the Northwest Territories, Diane Thom, Minister of Health and Social Services, and Dr. Kami Kandola, Chief Public Health Officer issued the following joint statement today to clarify the existing Public Health Order – COVID-19 Travel Restrictions and Self-Isolation Protocol.

Travel restrictions are a legitimate and necessary measure implemented by the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its impact on Northwest Territories (NWT) residents, communities and the health care system. While the CPHO does not have the authority to prohibit Canadians from entering the NWT, she does have the authority to restrict travel within our borders. Under the current orders, and in an effort to ensure the orders are adhered to, all travelers entering the NWT are greeted at a checkpoint by a Border Officer.

The Border Officer will collect their information, and if they do not meet an identified exemption, the Border Officer will inform them of the NWT's public health travel restrictions – including the requirement for anyone entering to self-isolate for 14 days. Travellers have the opportunity to voluntarily turn around. If they choose not to, they are informed that they must seek an exceptional circumstances exemption, and immediately self-isolate if they wish to proceed further in the NWT.

This is a shift in how the order was being implemented through May 29, and reflects an effort to more closely align implementation of the order with the mobility provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Prior to May 29, border officials asked people to turn around and return to their destination if they did not fit an existing exemption in order to meet our objectives.

The process outlined above is an interim measure and the CPHO and her team are working diligently on amendments to our travel restriction and self-isolation order to more transparently protect mobility rights under the Charter.

In an interview with CBC Television on Monday, June 8, Premier Cochrane was asked if tourism was “off the table” for the NWT. The Premier answered that tourism was on the table, so long as people self-isolated for 14 days, which is consistent with how CPHO orders are currently being implemented. While the GNWT approach to tourism during the pandemic is still developing, the NWT is expecting to establish a travel bubble with Nunavut as part of its new travel orders and will be encouraging tourism by residents of both territories. The Premier's comments were made in the context of the current understanding of Charter limitations on the CPHO's powers and the intention to promote tourism among NWT and Nunavut residents.

While it will respect the right of any Canadian resident to enter the territory, the GNWT will still be enforcing the CPHO's legitimate orders to restrict travel within the territory, including restrictions on leisure travel within the territory, to ensure that the health of all NWT residents and communities is protected. As stated in the House yesterday, new travel orders are expected to be implemented with Phase 2 of the Emerging Wisely Plan and when details of those orders are finalized, they will be thoroughly explained to NWT residents and the media.