



Assembly of
Manitoba Chiefs



Manitoba Keewatinowi
Okimakanak



FIRST NATIONS HEALTH AND SOCIAL
SECRETARIAT OF MANITOBA
First Nations Health and
Social Secretariat
of Manitoba

Public Health Considerations During COVID-19 for Sundance Leaders

Manitoba has entered Phase 3 of the Restoring Safe Services as of June 21, 2020 and over the next several months many Sundances will be happening across the province. The purpose of this document is to provide some information about the current knowledge, guidance and public health orders related to COVID-19 for Sundance Leaders to use as they make decisions and plans about if or how to proceed with their ceremonies.

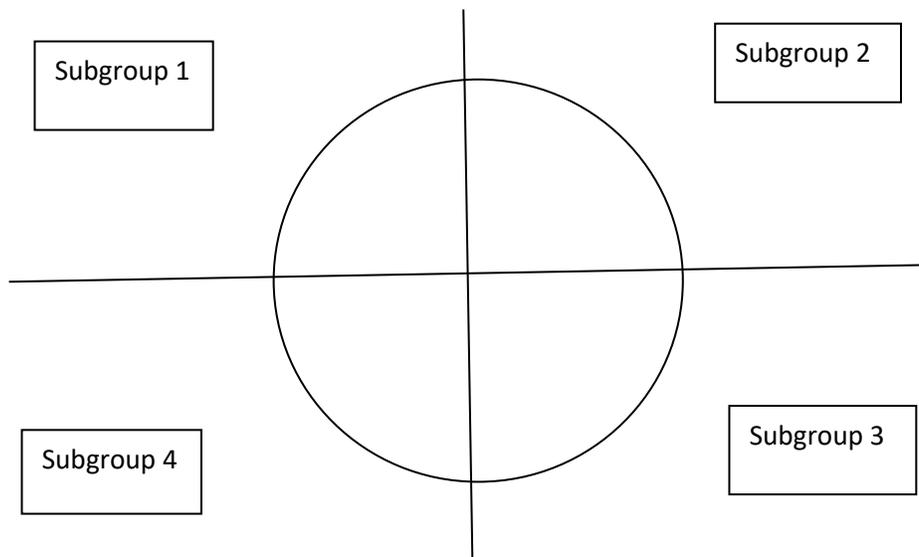
We recognize that Ceremonial Leaders, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Traditional Healers have protected and sustained knowledge and practices through many challenging contexts including times when ceremonies were prohibited by Canadian law. They have also adapted ceremonial practices to meet evolving needs like adopting universal precautions to prevent the transmission of blood borne infections. These leaders are best placed to make informed decisions about how to continue ceremonial practices in the current context as well.

Transmission of COVID-19

- COVID-19 is a virus that is spread through respiratory droplets.
- On average the virus can travel less than 2 metres with coughing/ sneezing which is why physical distancing is important.
- The virus can live for different lengths of time on different surfaces depending on the type of surface. For example it can live up to 72 hours on plastics. This is why frequent cleansing/ disinfecting of commonly touched surfaces is important.
- The vast majority of people who are exposed to COVID-19 who are going to get sick from it will develop symptoms within 10-12 days. Only a tiny number of people will get symptoms after 14 days, and so this is why the self-isolation period for people who have had a close contact with someone with COVID-19 or enter MB from the East or after international travel is 14 days.
- Reports estimate 20-50% of people infected with COVID-19 may not develop symptoms, and this is one of the reasons why there are limits to gathering size. It reduces the number of people who might be exposed if someone is there and is asymptotically spreading the virus.

Gathering Sizes

- Currently Manitoba has a public health order that limits outdoor gathering sizes to 100 people unless the groups can be kept separate with no inter-mingling.
- At a Sundance, you might consider limiting any contact between dancers and supporters, and this would be one way to have more people present without increasing the risk of spreading COVID-19 in a larger group.
- Another option could be to separate the areas where supporters sit so that some people (who could be separated by family groups, where they are camping, or other factors) only sit on one side of the arbour, and other supporters sit on the other side. Again, if people follow this and don't switch sides or intermingle it is a way to be present, participate and support while at the same time lowering the risk of spread of COVID 19.
- The circle could even be divided into four directions with 4 subgroups of up to 100. Within each section each subgroup should still be following physical distancing when interacting with people outside of their households.



- If this type of separation is used in order to have more people be able to participate, then each group (dancers, each subgroup) should have access to separate washroom facilities.

Travel Restrictions

People often travel extensively within the province, from other provinces, and sometimes even from outside of Canada in order to participate in these sacred ceremonies. The greatest risk of COVID-19 right now in MB is importing it from another jurisdiction with higher rates. There are both provincial and federal public health orders that require self-isolation for travelers.

- As of June 21st, people entering Manitoba from BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Northwestern Ontario, and the Territories do not need to self-isolate when entering Manitoba as long as they have no symptoms and no known contacts with anyone who has COVID-19.
- People entering Manitoba from the rest of Canada or from outside of Canada do still need to self-isolate for 14 days.
- If Sundance Leaders want to find a way to have people self-isolate at the Sundance site this would mean people who are self-isolating do not have contact with other people at the Sundance. This includes having a separate sleeping space, having separate washroom facilities, and not intermingling with other dancers or supporters.

Entry/ Exit Points

- If it is possible to limit the number of entry or exit points then it may be easier to incorporate the following safety measures:
 - Directing people to the appropriate subgroup location and ensuring they know the guidance around interacting with other subgroups;
 - Having signage/ posters available about physical distancing and hand hygiene;
 - Screening people for symptoms that could be related to COVID-19;
 - Supplying hand hygiene (handwashing stations or hand sanitizer) before people enter the space;
 - Recording names and contact information to facilitate contact tracing if anyone develops COVID-19.

Drum Groups/ Singers

The Province has not permitted choirs or musical theatre activities to resume at this time as there is a higher risk of transmission through singing as compared to speaking. Keeping that in mind but recognizing the central role of the drum and singers at Sundances the following measures may help reduce COVID-19 related risks:

- Hand drums with singers physically distanced and not facing each other would be a lower risk than many people gathered around a big drum.
- Position drum groups in open air instead of in a closed space and ensure appropriate physical spacing between drum groups.
- Consider limiting the number of singers around a big drum in order to allow for more spacing.
- Do not allow people who aren't singing to gather around drum.
- Ensure any sound equipment is appropriately cleaned between uses.

Dancers

- Different Sundances have different ways that they set up their lodges. Since open air and physical distancing are very effective in lowering the risk of spreading COVID-19, consider ways to build or set up the Sundance Lodge to have as much open air and space as possible.
- A minimum of 2 metres should be kept between dancers at all time.
- If dancers are going to use their eagle whistles, then consider spacing dancers even farther apart than 2 meters as the whistles may spread the virus farther than 2 metres. It would be even lower risk to ask dancers not to use eagle whistles this year.
- If possible, dancers would not camp with people outside of their households, but if they do setting up sleep spaces to be more than 2 meters apart and for people to sleep head-to-foot will lower the risk of spread of COVID-19.
- Limit the sharing of any utensils or cups between dancers and use individual utensils or cups whenever possible.

Piercing and Flesh Offerings

In addition to the precautions that are already taken to prevent the transmission of Blood Borne Infections, the following considerations may contribute to lowering the risk of spread of COVID-19 during these parts of the ceremony:

- Limit the number of people who are participating in this part of the ceremony to those who are absolutely necessary as it involves closer contact and a general principle is to limit the number of people in close contact with others.
- Since this involves close contact consider asking both those doing the piercing and those being pierced to wear masks for the entire period of time that they are in close contact.
- For the people doing the piercing, they can wear the same mask until it is wet or soiled. They will continue the usual practice of changing gloves and equipment for every person that they pierce.
- Instead of having other people gather around the person being pierced or when they break, ask them to support the person from their spot in the circle to avoid having a number of people in close contact.

Canupas

Different ceremonies have different practices for if/ how they send out the canupas and who participates in smoking them.

- COVID-19 could be spread through the sharing of Canupas, and so avoiding this would lower the risk of spread of COVID-19.

- This could mean dancers or their household members smoke their canupas, or only one designated person.

Meals and Feasting

Sharing food together is a really important part of the ceremonies, but COVID-19 can be spread through sharing dishes, sharing utensils, or in lines to get food at a meal or feast. Some potential ways to feast together while lowering the risk of spread of COVID-19 could be:

- Limiting the offering of communal kitchens or meal service for supporters, and asking people who are camping or attending to bring/ supply their own food.
- Encouraging people to bring/ supply their own food to a communal space where they can sit together while following physical distancing.
- If people want to share food at a feast, consider sharing things that are pre-packaged into individual portions so that serving utensils don't need to be used.

General Mitigation Measures

- Participants can use the [self-screening tool](#) before attending the community event. Anyone who has any symptoms should stay home.
- Have hand hygiene stations available at entry points and throughout the site.
- Place signage about physical distancing, hand hygiene, and cough etiquette throughout the site.
- Patrons and participants could consider wearing non-medical masks to protect others when physical distancing is not possible to maintain. More information about the use of non-medical masks is available from the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/about-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html>.

The Pandemic Response and Coordination Team (PRCT) recognizes all First Nation community efforts to reduce the spread of Covid-19 and supports the need for maintaining wholistic health and connection. The PRCT also recognizes First Nation sovereignty and has confidence in our communities' ability to make informed decisions that will keep themselves safe during the extraordinary time in history.

When and where needed, members of the PRCT would welcome an invitation to offer moral support, public health expertise and witness the good work of our communities.