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Nunavut to financially support hunters, childcare workers during COVID-19 [1]

Non-urgent medical travel cancelled, GN workers asked to work from home

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EXCERPTS

Hunters and childcare workers will receive financial support in light of COVID-19, the Government of Nunavut announced on Thursday, March 19.

At a daily press conference Premier Joe Savikataaq said each HTO in the territory will receive $25,000 for community harvesting and to provide food to their communities. And $531,000 has been set aside for childcare workers in licensed facilities across the territory to cover potential lost fees.

“We will be paying what the parents normally pay as daycare fees, so that the daycare workers who are not working anymore continue to be paid,” Savikataaq said.

There are still no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Nunavut. Savikataaq said 70 tests have been done and those that have come back have been negative. And 24 people who were originally under self-quarantine have been cleared, he said.

Dr. Michael Patterson, Nunavut’s chief medical officer of health, said at this point, there is no need for mass testing or screening for asymptomatic people, meaning people who don’t show symptoms.

“We will reconsider that if circumstances warrant,” Patterson said.

In a March 18 news release, the GN said non-essential public servants will transition to working from home by end of day today, March 20.

Most non-urgent medical travel has also been cancelled, and will be rescheduled for a time when it’s safe to travel, Patterson said.

“What was happening was people were going south, getting there and finding their appointments had been cancelled and we were not aware of it,” Patterson said.

The GN is also arranging for doctors and nurses to be available for people to talk with over the phone, so they don’t have to go to the hospital or health centre in non-urgent cases.

Anyone arriving in Nunavut is still required to self-isolate for a period of 14 days, except for certain people who provide vital services, Patterson said.

“We do recognize that the isolation for two weeks on arrival in Nunavut is not practical and, in some cases, dangerous for vital services such at RCMP, individuals who are here to repair vital infrastructure, including communications and water and service delivery of that nature,” Patterson said.

Patterson said the GN is also working to identify vital services in the territory to “ensure those individuals can deliver the service needed and do it in a way that is efficient and minimizes the risk to Nunavummiut.”

Savikataaq said the GN is also looking at options to keep food banks and soup kitchens open, but did not yet have details.

“Another message I’d like to give to Nunavummiut is please don’t panic and stock up and buy all the supplies in the stores,” Savikataaq said.

“The retailers have told us that the supply will not dry out.” He said. “What this does is the people that don’t have the financial means of stocking up, when they go to the store [to get] what they need, and it’s not there … they don’t get a chance to get it.”

Today, bars will close in Nunavut. Restaurants will remain open for takeout and delivery only and will just allow up to 10 people in lineups.

Grocery stores, gas stations and pharmacies will remain open. A list of closures can also be found on the Government of Nunavut’s website.

There are no plans to close social services, motor vehicle offices, or Iqaluit’s beer and wine store, Patterson said.

Health Minister George Hickes also urged Nunavummiut to continue to practise self-isolation and social distancing.

“I strongly recommend that if people are picking up any passengers at any airport, unless they actually have a physical handicap or mobility issues, to wait outside for any passengers,” Hickes said.
Hickes also said people arriving in Nunavut should not go directly to places such as grocery stores, but should go straight home instead.

Self-isolation is imperative, he said.

“If we really want to make an impact on limiting COVID-19 in Nunavut, we all have to participate,” Hickes said.

Transport minister to meet with mine officials, Inuit on Meliadine mine blockade

Economic Development and Transportation Minister David Akeeagok said at the press conference on Thursday that he will meet with the Rankin Inlet hamlet, mine officials and the Kivalliq Inuit Association after residents blocked a portion of the road to Agnico Eagle’s Meliadine gold mine earlier this week.

Agnico Eagle was screening workers before the GN started to require anyone returning to Nunavut to self-isolate, Akeeagok said. Furthermore, all employees are screened for flu-like symptoms before flying to the mine site, he said.

In statement issued on Thursday morning, Agnico Eagle said all Nunavut workers at its mine sites would be sent home with regular pay.

“Further assessments or actions planned by Agnico Eagle Mines will be reviewed by the Kivalliq Inuit Association, the hamlet of Rankin Inlet and the Government of Nunavut later on today,” Akeeagok said on Thursday.

Patterson, who had just arrived from a teleconference with the Kivalliq Inuit Association, Agnico Eagle and the hamlet of Rankin Inlet, said Agnico Eagle workers coming from the south who typically go through the Rankin Inlet airport are being rerouted.

“They get off the plane and straight into a bus that is operated by the mine and are driven straight to the mine and they stay there, do their work and then leave in the same fashion,” Patterson said.

“This is real and something that we’re trying to deal with … trying to take the community’s concerns and also the mine’s concerns. And our own concerns. We need to look after our Nunavummiut,” Akeeagok said.
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