

BC's Failure to Provide Adequate COVID-19 Safety Measures for Reopening Puts Indigenous Lives at Risk Say Indigenous Leaders

Heiltsuk, T̓silhqot̓'in and Nuu-chah-nulth pledge to support each other's efforts to restrict travel in their respective territories until safety conditions are met.

HEILTSUK, NUU-CHAH-NULTH, T̓SILHQOT̓'IN TERRITORIES - (June. 24, 2020) - A growing coalition of Indigenous leaders say BC's failure to consult on reopening and to provide adequate COVID-19 safety measures is putting Indigenous lives at risk, and they will support each other's efforts to restrict travel in their territories, until basic safety conditions are met, including:

- **COVID-19 Information Sharing** - to ensure early reporting of suspected and confirmed cases to Indigenous governments in nearby regions.
- **Screening** non-residents to ensure travellers are not symptomatic or infected with the virus.
- **Rapid testing** based on provincial health guidelines and prioritizing Indigenous and remote communities (there are only two rapid testing kits for all Indigenous communities in BC).
- **Culturally-safe contact tracing** teams, staffed by community members and supported with funding and training from BC, to keep communities safe with preventative tracing.

"The Premier cannot forget our free, prior and informed consent over our territories, and that we have not given our consent to open up the province," said Judith Sayers, President of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council. "We will do what we need to in order to protect our people, and if there is an impasse, we need to talk. For us, it is people before economics."

"While the government moves to open the entire province to travel and tourism, we are still waiting for basic safety measures and information sharing," said Marilyn Slett, Chief Councillor of the Heiltsuk Nation. "This means we cannot make informed decisions about the level or type of emergency measures to enact, and so the safest approach becomes blanket travel bans."

"We support the positions taken by Nuu-chah-nulth and Heiltsuk, and we have also restricted access to our communities to varying degrees throughout this crisis," said Chief Joe Alphonse, Chair of the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government. "Our priority is to protect our elders and our people, and this work is made much more difficult by BC's refusal to provide case information sharing, screening, rapid testing and culturally-safe contact tracing. Our nations will stand together to keep our people and communities safe."

The Heiltsuk, T̓silhqot̓'in National Government and Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council have all enacted various travel advisories, bans and checkpoints during the pandemic, and more recently, the Nuu-chah-nulth announced plans to restrict entry to most of Vancouver Island's west coast until COVID-19 safety conditions are met, a position the other leaders support.

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Globe and Mail opinion piece stating the position of these Indigenous leaders:

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-bcs-covid-19-re-opening-plans-continue-to-put-indigenous-people-at/>