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PURPOSE:

To enact a Saik'uz First Nation Funeral Protocol during the COVID-19 pandemic. This protocol will help to ensure the safety of our nation members when dealing with funerals during COVID-19. The Funeral Protocol will be lifted when the Provincial Health Officer lifts the restrictions on mass and/or group gatherings.

CURRENT SITUATION:

In early March 2020, BC's Public Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, ordered a ban on all mass gatherings of 50 or more people. In planning for the COVID-19 crisis, it has been identified that a Saik'uz First Nation Funeral Protocol is a high priority. As such, the following outlines the Saik'uz First Nation approach to a funeral during COVID-19.

Please note: The Saik'uz First Nation Funeral Protocol does not supersede any Community protocols, but should be considered in addition to the more stringent standard being recommended.

Saik'uz First Nation Funeral Protocols During COVID-19

Spiritual Practices

It is important to acknowledge the spiritual journey of those that pass on and enter the spirit world by continuing our traditional practices which can still be incorporated during COVID-19. Traditional practices can be performed or offered by individuals with physical distancing in innovative ways where we can honour and respect the spirit of the individual during this unprecedented time.

Mass Gatherings Cancellation

The Provincial Health Officer has cancelled mass gatherings of more than 50 people until further notice. This cancellation of mass gatherings is to reduce the number of people being infected by COVID-19. Interaction with people contributes to the transmission of respiratory illnesses, such as COVID-19, with Elders and individuals with pre-existing conditions being most at risk for poor outcomes.

Difficult Times – Difficult Decisions

The Saik'uz First Nation acknowledges that this is a difficult time and that a funeral during this time is even more traumatic. As such, these guidelines need to be recommended to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among our community and nation members. We need to keep our people safe.

Proceeding with a Funeral During COVID-19

- 1. Number of Attendees/Physical Distancing:** Although the Provincial Health Officer states no gatherings over 50 people, best practices state 5-10 people and these people must practice physical distancing (remaining 2 meters apart from another person). As such, Saik'uz First Nation advises applying best practices by limiting funerals to no more than 5-10 people in attendance with physical distancing measures in place. (Note: people living in the same household are exempt from this 2-meter guideline.)
- 2. People Attending:** Those attending the funeral practices (no more than 50) should not: be sick; in contact with those who are sick; have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days; or reside with an Elder, someone with a significant chronic disease, or children. It is also recommended to limit those physically attending the funeral service to immediate family and/or local community members only.
- 3. Avoid Contact:** Do not hug, shake hands, or have any human contact in order to limit transmission of COVID-19. Remain six feet apart. Do not touch your face and cough or sneeze into a tissue or the bend of your arm. Dispose of tissue in lined wastebaskets followed by proper handwashing. If handwashing is not available, use hand sanitizer.
- 4. Public Area Disinfected:** For those limited people taking care of funeral practices at this time, ensure all public areas (kitchen, bathroom, and common areas) are disinfected throughout the day. Disinfectant areas with a 1:50 bleach disinfectant solution. Pay particular attention to surfaces that are touched often.
- 5. Plan for Those Who Become Sick on Site:** Have Personal Protective Equipment on hand in case somebody becomes sick on site. Have a plan to isolate them and move them to safety to prevent transmission.
- 6. Hygiene Stations:** Have hand sanitizer and hand wash stations with lined wastebaskets, soap, and paper towel dispensers on-site and handwashing signage to promote proper and constant cleansing of hands.
- 7. Funeral Location:** If possible, hold the funeral outdoors, as there is greater ventilation and capacity for separation between attendees outside.
- 8. Viewing:** Limit viewing of the body to one person at a time while following physical distancing measures.
- 9. Communication:** Confirm that those limited people (50 or fewer) attending the funeral have a clear understanding of the COVID-19 funeral protocols. Ensure that all the precautions that are needed to ensure everybody's safety and to reduce virus transmission are in place.

10. Funeral Options

- a. *Spiritual Practices*: with physical distancing measures in place, spiritual practices may be performed such as smudging, cleansing the home, fire keeping in shifts (for the day), offering prayers, drumming/singing individually, connect with Elder via phone, and/or offering medicines to the fire or water.
- b. *Cremation*: Saik'uz First Nation acknowledges that some families may or may not believe in and/or practice cremation, but we encourage this practice until the COVID-19 Crisis is over.
- c. *Streaming the Ceremony*: utilize technology and stream the minimal funeral services to extended family and friends so they can watch from the safety of their own home.
- d. *Future Ceremony*: Saik'uz First Nation recommends that, when the Provincial Health Officer ends the ban on mass gatherings and it is safe for communities and nation members to gather, individuals that have passed during the time of the COVID-19 crisis be held up in ceremony as per the direction of the community's Traditional and/or Western funerals practices.

If you have any concerns or questions about your health, call *811, visit www.fnha.ca/coronavirus, or contact the Saik'uz Health Manager, Regina Thomas, at 250-567-0496 or health.manager@saikuz.com.

Signed,

Chief Priscilla Mueller
Saik'uz First Nation

June 29th, 2020