



# Learning from the response to COVID-19

## Discussion Guide

### Introduction

The Government of the Northwest Territories is undertaking a review of its internal operational management of the COVID-19 pandemic that will conclude with a lessons-learned report.

The review is underway and will draw on input from GNWT departments and agencies, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and Indigenous and community government leaders.

The review will consider:

- emergency measures coordination;
- the implementation and coordination of public health measures through the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat; and
- the legislative framework for public health emergencies.

Each of the following sections summarizes the GNWT's response to the pandemic, and is presented for your consideration before providing your feedback on the GNWT's framework, decisions, and actions in response to the pandemic.

To complete the survey, go to:

<https://haveyoursay.nwt-tno.ca/learning-from-the-response-to-covid-19>

## Coordination of Emergency Measures

When the pandemic started in March 2020, the GNWT implemented several emergency measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the Northwest Territories. Such measures included:

- restrictions on travel,
- self-isolation requirements for people who travelled and/or tested positive for COVID-19,
- limits on the size of public and private gatherings, and
- limits or prohibitions on activities deemed to increase the risk of COVID.

The GNWT's initial response to COVID-19 involved all departments and agencies, as well as the Government of Canada, and Indigenous governments of the Northwest Territories and NWT community governments.

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### Question to consider:

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- **What are your thoughts about the emergency measures coordinated by the GNWT?**

## Coordination and Implementation of Public Health Measures

As the impacts of the pandemic continued, the need for a longer term, sustained response became apparent. The COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat was created in September 2020 to address this issue.

GNWT public communications performed numerous functions during the pandemic, including providing information about public health orders, providing messaging intended to influence residents' choices and behaviours to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, sharing general information about COVID-19, and posting outbreak-specific advisories.

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### Questions to consider:

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- **What effect did the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat have on the GNWT's pandemic response?**
- **Did you think the GNWT communicated effectively about public health orders and to provide advice and information?**
- **What did you think of GNWT communications overall during the pandemic?**
- **What were the most effective ways the GNWT communicated during the pandemic?**

## Policy and Legislation

Public health legislation in the NWT affords the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) with broad powers to respond to a public health emergency, including the authority to make legally binding Public Health Orders. The legislation also allows the Minister of Health and Social Services to declare a territory-wide Public Health Emergency, which allows the Chief Public Health Officer to take strong, binding actions to protect all Northwest Territories residents, and swiftly respond to the daily-evolving needs of the healthcare system as it tackled the pandemic. Public health orders included:

- restrictions on travel;
- self-isolation requirements for people who travelled and/or tested positive for COVID-19;
- limits on the size of public and private gatherings; and
- limits or prohibitions on activities deemed to increase the risk of COVID-19.

Under the Public Health Act, a declaration of a Public Health Emergency remains in effect for 14 days, with the ability to extend that period if the emergency continues to exist and the extension is required in order to protect the public health. The Minister first declared a State of Public Health Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 18, 2020, and it was renewed every two weeks until March 29, 2022.

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### Question to consider:

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- **What specific changes could be made to Northwest Territories legislation to improve our pandemic response in the future?**

## Compliance and Enforcement

During the Public Health Emergency, the Chief Public Health Officer had the authority to issue public health orders to protect NWT residents and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Public health orders included (but were not limited to): restrictions on travel, self-isolation requirements for people who travelled and/or tested positive for COVID-19, limits on the size of public and private gatherings, and limits or prohibitions on activities deemed to increase the risk of COVID. These orders were enforced by the NWT Compliance and Enforcement Taskforce. The taskforce was supported in its role by other public agencies, including the RCMP and community bylaw officers.

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### Question to consider:

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- **What are your thoughts about the way that Public Health Orders were enforced in during the pandemic?**

## Next Steps

The review is expected to be complete by the end of August 2022. The final report will be shared with senior officials and the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight. A summary of key findings will be made available to the public.

Recommendations will be used to improve preparedness for future public health emergencies and propose changes to the legislation for public health emergencies.