



Thresholds and Criteria For Self-isolation Exemptions to Isolate in a Non-hub Community For Compassionate Or Exceptional Reasons

Background

The Travel Restrictions and Self-isolation order (as amended July 16, 2020) continues to identify Inuvik, Yellowknife, Hay River and Fort Smith as the four designated communities that people must self-isolate in.

There have been concerns raised recently with respect to NWT residents requesting and having special approval granted to isolate in non-designated communities. The Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) has taken steps to ensure the enforcement of the travel restriction and self-isolation order is implemented with compassion and flexibility in mind, however there remains some misunderstanding of the approach around when, or under what circumstance such an approval would be granted.

Criteria

There are two very clear criteria, one of which must be met when granting an exemption from the order to self-isolate in a non-hub community.

1. There must be a tangible need to recognize that a degree of compassion be exercised.
 - a. Is there an illness in the immediate family that the applicant needs to tend to?
 - b. Is there someone in the immediate family that is terminally ill?

Or;
2. There must be some scenario that suggests the situation meets an exceptional circumstance
 - a. Is the applicant elderly and not able to safely stay in a hotel in a hub community?
 - b. Is there a young person or unaccompanied minor who is unable to stay alone in a hub community?
 - c. Is the applicant recovering from a serious medical procedure that requires a high degree of care at home?
 - d. Are there home life circumstances that cannot be mitigated if the applicant had to stay in a hub community for 14 days (such as a newborn)?
 - e. Will there be impacts to a small business if the owner cannot be there to manage? These are outside of the essential worker process.

While these do not constitute an exhaustive list of circumstances, they are some of the more common examples that are put forward and worthy of considering.



Some examples that do not constitute rationale for an exemption to self-isolate in a non-hub community are:

- Prefer comforts of home.
- Suggest it will cost the GNWT less.
- Feel that they took adequate precautions and should not need to self-isolate in a hub upon return to NWT.
- Need to get back to organize a social event.
- Don't like the food at the isolation centre.
- Attending a funeral.

In addition to ensuring that there are clear compassionate, or exceptional circumstances associated with an application, there is also a need to ensure that community leadership is advised of decisions made by the CPHO respecting exemptions. This is not an approval, nor an opportunity for leadership to deny, but an opportunity to express concern (or not), of exemptions to isolate in their community and to be aware of exemptions. This has been a request of several Community leaders not only in this context, but also in the context of anyone who has been granted an exception, such as an essential worker. The CPHO is therefore making efforts to meet this request.

Procedures

Applicant files a self-isolation plan with ProtectNWT. (This should be submitted well in advance of the travel dates and return to the NWT). Or, an email or call is made to Protect NWT requesting special exemption from a current self-isolation plan.

ProtectNWT reviews the submitted SIP and then determines that there is a request to isolate in a non-hub community, places the review on pause and forwards it to the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer (OCPHO) for review and decision.

The OCPHO reviews the exceptional request and evaluates the justifiability of the request for exemption **AND** conducts a public health risk assessment.

OCPHO may request additional information. Common questions include:

- Are there any ESWs in the home?
- Is there anyone at high risk living in the home? (i.e., >65yrs, chronic disease, etc)
- Plan to safely self-isolate in the home (separate room? Separate bathroom? separate living spaces?) Is it possible to truly isolate away from others in the home?
- Is the applicant coming from a high risk location?

The request is reviewed by committee and it is either approved, denied, or it requests additional information.

Protect NWT provides the decision. If approved, an exemption letter is provided. If denied, a denial of request letter is sent.