



# ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS BULLETIN ASSEMBLÉE DES PREMIÈRES NATIONS

473, RUE ALBERT STREET  
8<sup>th</sup> FLOOR / 8<sup>e</sup> ÉTAGE  
OTTAWA ON K1R 5B4  
(613) 241-6789 telephone / téléphone (613) 241-5808 fax / télécopieur

**June 23, 2009**

## **AFN says urgent measures on H1N1 must be in place before the fall**

Today, AFN Regional Chief Angus Toulouse who holds the portfolio for health called for three urgent measures to improve the response to pandemic outbreaks of H1N1 in First Nations communities.

These include: striking an independent taskforce to study the recent outbreaks in Ontario and Manitoba and make recommendations to ensure more seamless service; developing and instituting national guidelines for service to First Nations; and providing investments that will allow every First Nation to develop a pandemic plan, as well as investing in Annex B which is the portion of the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan that addresses outbreaks in First Nations.

“So far the majority of H1N1 cases have been mild, but if this outbreak had been more virulent our communities would have been devastated,” said Regional Chief Angus Toulouse, who pointed out that the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that H1N1 could reappear in the fall and cause more severe illness. “There is an urgent need to ensure every First Nations community across Canada can equally access emergency health services before the fall.”

As outbreaks of H1N1 spread through northern Manitoba and Ontario over the last few months, First Nations communities witnessed delays in receiving urgently needed medical supplies, or breakdowns in communications between provincial and federal governments and a lack of consistency in managing the outbreaks between the provinces. It was also clear that measures aimed at containing the virus were ill-suited to the social realities of First Nations, for example being told to avoid contact with others while living in cramped and overcrowded conditions or being told to wash their hands frequently when running water was not available.

The Regional Chief blamed a lack of national standards for the inconsistencies. He added that while Canada invested \$1 billion into the Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan, no investments were made into Annex B, the guidelines that federal, provincial and

territorial governments should follow when addressing outbreaks in First Nations communities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been clear that there is a link between the severity of influenza cases and pre-existing chronic diseases, living in poor and overcrowded housing, poor-quality drinking water and sub-standard healthcare.

“Conditions in many of our communities are akin to those of the developing world. This has placed our communities at the highest level of risk in Canada. Clearly, if there is no improvement in planning and services, the worsening of this virus could have tragic consequences in the fall,” said Regional Chief Angus Toulouse.

-30-

Karyn Pugliese, AFN Health Communications Officer 613-292-1877 or [kpugliese@afn.ca](mailto:kpugliese@afn.ca)