



DENE NATION
Northwest Territories
Regional Office
**ASSEMBLY
OF FIRST
NATIONS**

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Dene Nation Elders Committee Joint Statement on COVID-19 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 9, 2021, Denendeh, NWT – The Dene Nation Elders Committee met to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic affecting Denendeh. The Dene Nation Elders Council has provided their statements about COVID-19 that are affecting the health and wellness in Denendeh. The Elders Council asks each of us to use our Dene Values and Principles to strengthen our commitment to each other.

The role of Elders is the keepers of knowledge from our ancestors. The Elders guide the Leaders to guide our Nation. Elders pass the knowledge onto the younger generation. The Elders are our treasure chest, and we honour their words.

“We must show unity amongst ourselves, that we are stronger together. Practice Dene values of sharing food, taking care of the Elderly, and protecting the children. We encourage our people to go out "on the Land" to your fall camps. The time on the Land will remind people of why we love this Land so much. Go there to pray, to practice Dene Law.”- Dene Nation Elders Council.

“We encourage one another to take care, to self-isolate, stay home, use masks, to stay healthy and safe follow restrictions. Pray for each other, harvest traditional medicines from the Land. Elders of long ago transmitted to us and foretold of people getting sick. Help the vulnerable, pray, take care of each other.” - Elder Mary Teya – Gwich'in.

“Covid-19 is here; we do not know what is going to happen next. This illness was predicted, “a sickness will come to this Earth, it will take many people, prayer is the only thing that will help.” Go back to the Land and pray, love, is the right path and listen to each other. Listen to our Elders. The young need this message. Forgive, forgive each other; learning to forgive will open the path to move on with our lives. Those who know Dene Law have love in their hearts; we are happy people, we need to go back to the Traditional Way; this is the right path. Guide and educate the children in Dene Law to give them a better future.”

- Gordon Yakeleya, Sahtu

“Covid has slowed everything down. We ask where did COVID-19 come from and when is it going to go away? It is like we are being punished for something. We have our own Dene Law, but few are practicing it. The young are not following Dene Law. All we can do is pray.” – Jonas Sangris, Akaitcho.



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"We are all very concerned, as many do not believe COVID-19 is real. Start following safety protocols, distancing, wash hands. This virus is airborne. It knows no boundaries and is very contagious. The virus was foretold by past Dene Leaders. People need to be cleaner by not spitting everywhere. Mental wellness is of primary concern. There are people with substance addictions.

Always give thanks to the Creator to help protect Denendeh. We are hurting due to COVID-19. Buy extra dry goods and share it. We will make a better tomorrow for all the children - they are the future. Children need to be supported to help themselves, so when they reach out, the door will not close on them, "let's include them, not exclude them." If we work together, Denendeh will be a place to call home, to live your lives. Every First Nation needs to set up a Bush Camp, a safe place for people to gather. To experience rules of Bush Living." - Rita Cli, Dehcho Region.

"We need to work together. We need to change with the times. The common thread among us is the protection of our Land and Water- For Each Other. Our responsibility to care and protect it for future generations comes together as a family. Times are changing now; COVID-19 is an opportunity to remind us who we are as Dene. To remind us of who we are and what we need to do. Going back to the Land is the safest place for us." – Dene National Chief Norman Yakeleya.

The Elders' final message is to practice the Dene values of sharing, respecting, caring, and being proud of who you are. Our Dene Principals guide our children to understand the Dene ways and give our youth hope. We come from strong people. Our Dene Values and Principles are to help us navigate our actions during challenging days.

The best defense is vaccination and medicines from the Land. Do what Kakisa has done by achieving a 100% vaccine rate. We are Stronger Together.

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For More Information: Leanne Goose, communications@denenation.com