



MILLE LACS BAND OF OJIBWE

Executive Branch of Tribal Government

DECLARATION OF STATE OF EMERGENCY & ACTIVATION OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

Sunday, March 15, 2020

Dear Mille Lacs Band Members,

The primary responsibility of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe tribal government is to protect the health, safety and general welfare of Mille Lacs Band members. The Band's Tribal Emergency Response Committee (TERC) has been meeting regularly to develop an emergency response plan to address COVID-19 (coronavirus).

On Saturday, March 14, Chief Executive Benjamin convened an emergency meeting of the TERC with Secretary-Treasurer Sheldon Boyd, Band commissioners, our public health and medical experts, and Band legal staff.

Today, March 15th, Chief Executive Benjamin signed an Executive Order making a declaration that the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe is in a **State of Emergency**.

Also today, Speaker Sheldon Boyd convened an emergency meeting of the Mille Lacs Band Assembly, which met twice today to draft, consider and pass into law the "**Emergency Management Act**", creating a new Title 28 in Band Statutes. This law authorizes the Chief Executive to implement the Executive Order to carry out certain emergency measures that are necessary to ensure the health and well-being of Band Members. The Declaration of a State of Emergency and passage of the Emergency Management Act by the Band Assembly will ensure the Band is able to take such emergency actions as may be necessary to prepare and protect Band Members should an outbreak occur in our Band community.

Both President Trump and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz made emergency declarations for the federal and state governments on Friday, March 13, freeing up additional funding which local and tribal governments may access for community

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preparedness for COVID-19. The Band's declaration of a State of Emergency will allow the Band to access additional resources to assist with preparedness costs and expenses incurred resulting from the COVID-19. Ordinarily the Band Assembly would prefer to allow Band Members time to review substantive changes to band law prior to passage, but this emergency requires expedited passage to protect the welfare of the Band.

We are closely monitoring the development of the COVID-19 virus situation and are closely coordinating with federal, state, and tribal health authorities on a continuing basis. As of today, March 15, there are currently 35 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the State of Minnesota, although that number is rising daily. According to the State Department of Public Health, the risk to the Mille Lacs, Pine or Aitkin area being exposed to COVID-19 remains low at this time, but the situation could change within days.

According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), older adults and people with certain underlying health conditions such as diabetes, lung disease, heart disease or other chronic diseases are at increased risk of contracting the virus and will have a harder time fighting it. The fact is that our population of Band Members with those underlying health conditions is much higher than in non-Indian communities, which means our Band communities are especially vulnerable if COVID-19 were to spread through the Band.

It is critical that we do our part as a Band government to take measures to do whatever is necessary to prevent spread to our community. **The purpose of this letter is not to alarm, but to inform**, because it is critical that Band Members understand what measures are being taken to protect Band Members.

Activation of State of Emergency Plan

The following are preliminary steps that the Mille Lacs Band government is taking to implement this State of Emergency to protect our Band community.

1. Beginning on Wednesday, March 18, **the Band's Early Childhood and K-12 programs in the Nay Ah Shing school system will close for 2 weeks with a plan of reopening on March 30.** Daycare will remain open at this time. This follows suit with the Governor's 10:00 a.m. announcement this morning that all Minnesota and public and charter schools will close for this period as well. Band educators and staff will also use this time to make plans for the possibility of needing to institute long-distance learning.

2. The Band government has either postponed or cancelled the following events, and all future community events involving large gatherings will be postponed until further notice.
 - Treaty Day Celebration scheduled for March 20 has been postponed
 - Chiminising Powwow scheduled for March 21 has been postponed
 - March Bi-wiidoopamishing elder gathering at Grand Makwa Cinema scheduled for March 18 has been cancelled
 - All future government events with expected gathering of 250 people or more
 - Smaller events (fewer than 250 people) that are held in crowded spaces that do not allow social distancing of 6 feet per person
 - All gatherings or events scheduled at the Assisted Living Units
 - Events with more than 10 people where most participants are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19
3. Mille Lacs Early Education schools will be closed on Monday, March 16, to allow staff to disinfect all spaces. Regular classes will resume on Tuesday, March 17. The State of Minnesota has not yet recommended cancelling school at this time, but the Band is prepared to act immediately if the Band becomes aware of any potential risk to children or staff.
4. Effective immediately, the schedule for cleaning/disinfecting restrooms in all public Band facilities has been increased.
5. To mitigate the risk of exposing our elders, access to the ALU in Districts I and III has been restricted to residents only. Community Elders may continue to come in for breakfast and lunch.
6. In order to disseminate information as quickly as possible, we have established a page on the Mille Lacs Band website (www.millelacsband.com) that will serve as a central hub for information gathering. This page will contain the prevention and self-care recommendations described in this letter, updates on further actions the Mille Lacs Band will take, and links to federal and state health authority websites containing additional resources and information. We will continually update this page and we encourage Band members to periodically monitor it for any updated information.

7. All Band employees will report to work on Monday, March 16. Preventative measures have already been activated for Band employees. There will be a TERC meeting Monday, March 16. At that time, we will review new data and determine any additional steps that will help protect the Band community.
8. We have directed all government employees to stay home if they are experiencing a fever, coughing, or shortness of breath or if they have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19. Employees will be paid sick leave if they do not have any sick leave time accrued.
9. To protect our Band members, a travel ban is in effect for all Band employees. We are prohibiting employees from work-related travel and encouraging the use of conference calling as an alternative to in-person meetings. Any employee returning from Annual Leave will be required to disclose any travel and will be not allowed on Band property for 14 days if they traveled to an area with an outbreak.

Precautionary Measures

There are precautionary measures we strongly recommend all Band Members take. COVID-19 is a new disease, and health authorities around the world are still learning about it. COVID-19 is spread mainly from person-to-person. It is spread between people who are in close contact with each other and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is also spread by contacting a contaminated surface and then touching your mouth, nose, and possibly the eyes.

The best every-day practices for all Band Members to prevent illness include:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds more frequently, particularly after you have been in a public space or after blowing your nose, coughing, and sneezing.
- If hand soap is not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose, and eyes if you have not washed your hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Frequently clean and disinfect touched surfaces daily. Use soap and water to clean surfaces first before disinfecting. Most common household disinfectants registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will suffice. Be sure to use them as directed on their labels.

- When you go out in public, keep away from others who are sick, and practice “Social Distancing”, which means limiting your close contact with others. The CDC recommends distance of six feet. limit close contact and wash your hands often.
- Avoid crowds as much as possible.
- Avoid travel as much as possible.

How Families can Plan Ahead:


Planning ahead is very important for all Band Members. There are steps Band families can take to plan ahead, which include:

- We advise all Band Members to designate a bedroom and bathroom, if space permits, to be used by a family member in the event they become sick. If a designated space is not possible, clean and disinfect all common areas often.
- Stock up on two weeks-worth of food, paper supplies and over-the-counter cold/flu remedies. This step is good planning that federal agencies like FEMA have recommended in the past to ensure families are prepared for any kind of emergency.
- We encourage Band members to stay away from gatherings larger than 250 people. We are also encouraging Band members to exercise reasonable caution and to limit travel. Band members should ensure that they have hand soap and household disinfectants.

The Band is working closely with the Minnesota Department of Health and will be notified of positive test results sent from our clinic. This situation understandably has created concern, but it does not warrant panic. We must treat this situation seriously and act with reasonable caution. We are confident that we will see through this challenging time.

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Chief Executive Melanie Benjamin


Secretary-Treasurer and Speaker of the
Assembly Sheldon Boyd