



## Bulletin to All Schmiedeleut re. COVID-19

July 8, 2020

To all Schmiedeleut:

Below you will find a brief update regarding the Hutterian Safety Counsel and our work related to COVID-19, particularly regarding its impact in Hutterite communities in South Dakota, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, and lessons we can learn from those experiences. In Manitoba, Hutterite Communities have been fortunate thus far, but COVID-19 will inevitably arrive as well. Overall, several deaths among Hutterites have been linked to COVID-19. Although we may all be weary of COVID-19 restrictions, we still need to remain cautious.

### Manitoba Phase Three Update

In Manitoba, we entered Phase 3 of restoring services on June 21. This information was distributed several weeks ago. As a result, the following changes were announced:

1. Public gatherings increased to 50 people indoors and 100 outdoors.
2. Worship spaces can increase capacity up to a maximum of 30% of capacity. That means a church with a capacity of 200 people can legally seat 60 people (30 per side in this example).
3. Dining rooms can seat full capacity as long as each table group is separated from other tables by at least 6 feet.
4. Interprovincial travel from AB and SK can occur without mandatory self-isolation. However, due to the numerous outbreaks in Hutterite communities in Saskatchewan and Alberta, the HSC recommends **strong caution** when travelling to or from the west and that travel is best avoided for now.
5. **Travel to and from the USA remains restricted** until at least July 21 and may remain restricted beyond that due to the large uptick in cases in the US.

### Saskatchewan and Alberta Update

Multiple communities in SK and AB have been severely hit with the coronavirus, and dozens have fallen ill, including numerous hospitalizations.

In Saskatchewan's southern region, a large number of active cases are on Hutterite communities and this has resulted in significant news coverage. Multiple Hutterite Communities have been infected with COVID-19, many of them linked to a large funeral a few weeks ago.

Initially, there was strong resistance to any public health input by impacted Hutterites; the reaction of some community leaders has been problematic. Because of this, the Saskatchewan and Alberta Health Authorities reached out to HSC to help facilitate cooperation.

Both provinces' health authorities together with the HSC released joint statements explaining the outbreaks in Hutterite communities and the associated challenges and included a call to avoid stigmatizing Hutterites. Currently, there is still some resistance, but there is increased cooperation between the Health Authorities and Hutterite communities.

## **South Dakota Update**

HSC is aware that there are many cases of COVID-19 on multiple Hutterite colonies in SD. South Dakota has lax laws regarding COVID-19 compared to Canada and few restrictions are in place which has resulted in greater spread of the virus.

Take extreme caution when visiting and avoid visiting communities with confirmed cases.

## **Lessons to Learn**

1. Community leaders need to realize that Public Health has the responsibility and resources to support, help, and test sick community members and implement measures to prevent the spread of the virus, including evaluating hygiene practices, working out plans for self-isolation of infected members, and limiting travel to essential travel only. Officials want to work with people by educating first. If government or health officials become aware that communities are becoming lax, they may take more serious actions.
2. Community leaders should understand that there is a spotlight on Hutterites. Non-Hutterites become concerned when they perceive that we are not following public health orders or opposing the law. They have a right to be concerned when community members ignore health orders and put others within and outside the community at risk.
3. Manitoba currently has a low caseload. Hutterites should try to ensure that we do our part to keep the numbers low. We do not want to be recognized or blamed as the folks who brought COVID-19 to Manitoba. This could lead to backlash against our people because we are a highly visible minority. Yet, because the virus knows no boundaries, we can expect infections in MB Hutterite communities as well.
4. For those provinces or states with impacted Hutterite communities, it is important to be prudent and halt travel to impacted communities until they are clear of the virus. In the USA, the problem is amplified by the financial risk associated with medical cost should members become sick.
5. If a community should acquire COVID cases, HSC is there to support and help in any way we can. HSC acts as a buffer between health authorities and Hutterite communities by ensuring good information is distributed, and by helping communities come into compliance without attracting media attention or potential fines.
6. It's important that Hutterites continue to follow public health orders and guidelines. In Canada, the provincial health authorities across all three prairie provinces trust HSC and reach out to HSC for support, and we need to maintain that relationship.
7. We need to be transparent and a light to the world. We can do that by observing the law and by being respectful toward officials.

We want to encourage all leaders to be aware of the eyes on us and to help us be a light. Thank you all for staying within the bounds of the law despite our growing COVID-19 fatigue. But most important of all, let's consider those among us who are vulnerable and do what we can to protect them.

*Hutterian Safety Council COVID-19 Taskforce*