

**AFN C-19 National Task Force  
Daily Update for: May 6, 2020**

**Health Sector**

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html#a1>

**Areas in Canada with cases of COVID-19, as of 2020-05-06 11:00AM EDT**

Province	Confirmed Cases	Hospitalization (ICU)*	Deaths	Recovered
BC	2,232	78 (21)	121	1,472
AB	5,893	87 (20)	106	3,219
SK	487	13 (4)*	6	310
MB	282	4 (0)*	7	238
ON	18,722	1,032 (219)	1,429	13,222
QC	33,417	1,821 (218)	2,398	7,923
Newfoundland/Lab	259	4 (2)	3	241
NB	119	0 (0)	-	118
NS	991	5 (2)	41	652
PEI	27		-	25
Yukon	11		-	11
NWT	5		-	5
Nunavut	0			
Repatriated Travelers	13			
<b>Total</b>	<b>62,458</b>	<b>3,044 (486)</b>	<b>4,111</b>	<b>27,436</b>
<b>Active Cases= 30,911</b>				

\*Some provinces report numbers *current* hospitalizations and ICU admissions. Others report the total *cumulative* number of hospitalizations and ICU admissions. Also, numbers are amalgamated as they are made available from various hospitals; they are therefore updated intermittently and are likely to be less accurate and current than other data points.

	Cases	Deaths	Recovered
<b>Globally</b>	3,689,887	258,160	1,210,066

- Data is as of May 6 at 10:32am from Johns Hopkins University:

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

**Epidemic Summary**

At this time, **69%** of COVID-19 cases were related to community transmission, while **16%** were either exposed while travelling or exposed to a traveler coming to Canada. The remaining **15%** are “pending”.

As of **May 4**, 2020, Canada has an overall case fatality rate of **6.3%**.

## Risk to Canadians

COVID-19 is a serious health threat, and the situation is evolving daily. The risk will vary between and within communities, but given the increasing number of cases in Canada, the risk to Canadians is considered **high**.

There is an increased risk of more severe outcomes for Canadians:

- Aged 65 and over
- With compromised immune systems
- With underlying medical conditions

## As provided by Pamela Wolfe-Roberge, CDCD, FNIHB/ISC

Please see below a summary of COVID-19 test positive cases, associated with First Nations communities in Canada, reported through communities, FNIHB Regional Medical Officers, and media as of **May 5, 2020**

Jurisdiction	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	ATL	NR
# test positive COVID-19 Cases	37	26	26	0	41	31	0	16*

### Data Sources:

British Columbia:

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/a6f23959a8b14bfa989e3cda29297ded>

Alberta: <https://covid19stats.alberta.ca/#cases>

Saskatchewan: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus/cases-and-risk-of-covid-19-in-saskatchewan>

Manitoba: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/updates/index.html#cases>

Ontario: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus#section-0>

Quebec: <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/covid-19/donnees>

New Brunswick:

[https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/respiratory\\_diseases/coronavirus/case-map.html](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/respiratory_diseases/coronavirus/case-map.html)

Nova Scotia: <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/data/>

Prince Edward Island: <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/health-and-wellness/pei-covid-19-testing-data>

Newfoundland and Labrador: <https://covid-19-newfoundland-and-labrador-gnl.hub.arcgis.com/>

Yukon: <https://yukon.ca/covid-19>

Northwest Territories: <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

Additional source (national): <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/tracking-every-case-of-covid-19-in-canada-1.4852102#alberta>

### **Housing, Infrastructure, Water & Emergency Management Sector**

#### **Local States of Emergencies:**

**First Nations Local States of Emergencies: AS Per ISC report**

First Nation States of Emergency- As per ISC website May 06,2020									
Region	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	ATL	Territories	Total
Confirmed	57	33	4	20	68	4	7	2	195

**2020 Flood Season General Assessments: As Per ISC EMD 2020 FN Flood / Wildland Fire Situation Report as of May 5, 2020** - Updates in Bold

**FLOODING** –

**2020 Flood Season General Risk Assessments:**

There are currently **22** communities impacted by flooding (, AB 13 and BC **9**), and 5 partially evacuated (NWT 1, AB 3 and BC 1). There are **795** residents currently evacuated.

● **BC: FLOOD RISK FORECAST – DECREASING**

- Bonaparte First Nation (686) Population 201
  - PARTIAL EVACUATION – ROCK SLIDE
  - **04MAY2020: one family of 3 still evacuated due to compromised bridge access to their home;**
- Soda Creek First Nation (716) Population 170
  - **04MAY2020: some damage to roads, including road to water treatment plant; Band continues to monitor Rose Lake Dam levels.**
- Williams Lake First Nation (719) Population 279, Within 50 km of a significant town
  - **04MAY2020: flooding has formed a new deep channel next to water treatment plant; approval to construct a temporary waterline was given to connect water treatment plant to line on other side of river; City of Williams Lake hired a Williams Lake Indian Band company to do the environmental and archaeological monitoring on the Williams Lake sewage release incident.**
- Canim Lake First Nation (713), Population 408
  - **04MAY2020: sand bagging around culvert outflows late last week; road is stable for light traffic only; 10 homes, 28 people, remain on alert on Tsq'escen Road; Band continues to closely monitor Chris Lake dam levels.**

● **AB: FLOOD RISK FORECAST – MODERATE TO HIGH**

- Sucker Creek (456) Within 50 km of a significant town, Population 766
  - PARTIALLY EVACUATED
  - **4MAY2020: Flood situation has stabilized and there are no further threats to the community. SOLE expired April 30, 2020. The ECC and Reception Centre have been demobilized.**
- Little Red River Cree Nation/Garden River (447) Population 4,689, No year-round road access
  - **4MAY2020: In Trapper's Creek and Garden River, the water levels have dropped to safe levels. The ice pack has moved on and the flood threat to community is no longer present. Bridges are getting inspected today to deem**

their stability and safety, as per re-entry plan. No reports of any homes flooding at this time, only building reporting damages is the Sewer Lift Station. Six homes in the community have basements, they will be inspected today to ensure there are no damages. Nation's Maintenance crew are currently working on getting Garden River Services up and running prior to lifting the Evacuation Order. If everything goes according to plan with re-entry process, than the earliest that residents could return to their homes will be the evening of May 5th. BCR to extend SOLE is currently being delivered to receive signatures.

● **SK: FLOOD RISK FORECAST**

- **4MAY2020: An advisory warning of the potential for localized flooding due to ice jamming along the North Saskatchewan River is in effect.**
- **This has led to a MODERATE flood risk warning for the following First Nations:**
  - 1. Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation (355)**
  - 2. Wahpeton Dakota Nation (358)**
  - 3. One Arrow First Nation (373)**
  - 4. Beardy's and Okemasis (369)**
  - 5. Little Pine First Nation (340)**
  - 6. Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, Lean Man First Nations (343)**
  - 7. Thunderchild First Nation (349)**

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**Wildfire:** High Risk from BC to Southern Saskatchewan; low risk from Manitoba to the Atlantic.

**1. British Columbia**

Provincial Fires to Date: 104; 3 in the last 7 days; 94.2% extinguished;

*(Note: 80.8% of wildfires are assessed as Human Induced.)*

Active Fires: 6; New Fires: 1 or 16.75; Under Control: 5 or 83.3%

Fire Centres: Northwest– 0; Prince George– 2; Cariboo– 0; Kamloops – 1; Southeast – 0; Coastal – 3 *(Note: All active fires are assessed as Human Induced.)*

**2. Alberta**

New Wildfires: Out of Control -0; Being Held – 0; Under Control – 15 Turned Over – 3;

Extinguished - 2; TOTAL Wildfires – 10;

Current Wildfire Situation: Out of Control -0; Being Held – 0; Under Control – 12; Turned Over – 6; Extinguished - n/a; TOTAL Wildfires – 18;

**3. Saskatchewan**

Provincial Fires to Date: 12

Active Wildfire: 1 - Hudson Bay Fire Protection Area; Contained – 0; On-going Assessment – 0; Protecting Property – 0;

First Nation – This wildfire is burning off reserve, northwest of Cumberland House First Nation;

Not Contained – 1 Suppression action is taking place, but the fire is expected to grow in size.

**4. Manitoba - Fires reported to date – 0**

**5. Ontario Wildfire Update**

Provincial Fires – 1

Active Wildfires - 1

District Name: Thunder Bay

Size (ha): 0.2

Status: Under Control

Date Started: May 5, 2020 7:26 PM

**6. Quebec Wildfire Update**

Provincial Fires – 1

Active Wildfires – 1

District Name: Gatineau

Size (ha): 3

Status: Under Control

Date Started: March 5, 2020

**7. New Brunswick Wildfire Update**

No new wildfires

District: Fredericton

Size: 117.7 ha

**8. Nova Scotia Wildfire Update**

No new wildfires

All areas Not Applicable, Low or Moderate

**9. Prince Edward Island - Fires reported to date – 0**

**10. Newfoundland/Labrador - Fires reported to date – 0**

**11. Yukon Territories Wildfire Update**

No notable fire activity at present.

NOTE: Southern Yukon - Forest fuels are drying and there is an increased risk of surface fires starting. Carry out any forest activities with caution. Burn permits are suspended.

**12. Northwest Territories Wildfire Update - Fires reported to date – 0**

## **Communications Sector**

**AFN chief calls COVID-19 outbreak in Saskatchewan's far north alarming**

**THE CANADIAN PRESS - May 5, 2020**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/6909796/coronavirus-afn-covid-19-outbreak-saskatchewan/>

**Advocates concerned child abuse going unreported with schools closed**

**CTV NEWS - May 5, 2020**

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/advocates-concerned-child-abuse-going-unreported-with-schools-closed-1.4926814>

**Alberta suspends some environmental monitoring at 16 oilsands projects due to COVID-19**

**GLOBAL NEWS - May 6, 2020**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/6909862/oilsands-monitoring-suspended-covid-19/>

## **Numbers**

<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1581964230816/1581964277298#chap5>

### **Confirmed cases of COVID-19**

On First Nations reserves in provinces, as of May 5, ISC is aware of:

- 161 confirmed positive COVID-19
- 17 hospitalizations
- 2 deaths

Case numbers per region:

- British Columbia: 37
- Alberta: 26
- Saskatchewan: 26
- Ontario: 41
- Quebec: 31

## **Full Stories**

**AFN chief calls COVID-19 outbreak in Saskatchewan's far north alarming**

**THE CANADIAN PRESS - May 5, 2020**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/6909796/coronavirus-afn-covid-19-outbreak-saskatchewan/>

The national chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) says an outbreak of COVID-19 in Saskatchewan's far north is alarming.

Perry Bellegarde noted Tuesday that there's been a steady rise in cases mainly from in and around the Dene community of La Loche, 600 kilometres northwest of Saskatoon.

He said the English River First Nation's territory is also in the area and it, too, has reported cases of COVID-19.

Bellegarde said he's hearing that local leadership needs to be more involved in decision-making and that some northerners haven't been allowed to travel south to buy food.

“That was a very big issue for a lot of them, because they don’t have access to grocery stores,” he said.

Saskatchewan health officials say more staff have been sent to the area to help track the spread of the novel coronavirus by door-to-door testing and screening.

The province’s public safety agency said a plane was used to fly test samples to Regina.

Right now, most of Saskatchewan’s active cases are in the far north, where restrictions on non-essential travel are being enforced at checkpoints.

“We’ve said that from Day 1, when this first started hitting, that First Nations communities, First Nations territories, our people are going to be vulnerable because of the overcrowded conditions our people live in,” Bellegarde said.

“We don’t have access to hospitals in the far north.”

Bellegarde said he believes Saskatchewan is lifting COVID-19 restrictions too quickly in other parts of the province.

On Tuesday, the province said 18 of 20 new cases in the last 24 hours came from in and around La Loche.

Leonard Montgrand, regional contact for the Metis Nation-Saskatchewan, said he feels the provincial government has been providing a lot of support over the last three weeks.

“I think we should have had a lot of support prior to that,” said Montgrand, who added that more consultation with the community is required.

“They don’t understand the community dynamics and how our community is a very social-orientated community,” he said.

“Working with the province in terms of the resource officers... and the other programs that they’re bringing into the community, we do have to communicate more, I will say that.”

#### **Data gaps exist on COVID-19 cases in Indigenous communities, says research fellow**

Indigenous Services Canada releases cumulative number of positive cases, but no data on deaths, recoveries

CBC News - May 06

Leaders and academics have concerns the data being collected and reported on COVID-19 cases in Indigenous communities isn't presenting a full picture.

The number of cases of COVID-19 in First Nations reserves continues to rise this week, according to data reported [by Indigenous Services Canada](#).

The cumulative number ISC reported as of May 4 was 151 confirmed positive cases on reserve, broken down by province:

British Columbia: 36

Alberta: 26

Saskatchewan: 20

Ontario: 38

Quebec: 31

The number includes two deaths, but that information is not currently listed online. The ISC website also does not include the number of recovered cases, the number or names of First Nations communities affected, or account for First Nations members who live off-reserve, including in long-term care facilities.

It's why Courtney Skye, a research fellow at Yellowhead Institute, has been scanning newspapers, local media reports, Facebook groups, and First Nation government websites for additional COVID-19 data.

She said community reports are outpacing the data that is being reported by ISC, including the number of Indigenous people dying of COVID-19 who are not being counted by ISC because they live off-reserve. On Tuesday, an elder who was in a rehabilitation centre in Montreal was reported as the first known Cree person from Quebec to die from COVID-19.

"Our data needs are not being met," said Skye, who is from Six Nations of the Grand River near Brantford, Ont.

"There's all these ways in which lived realities of First Nations are not captured and represented fairly. Clearly, First Nations have less access to health care, reporting, transparency. It's frustration because you want to see people treated fairly, and considered equally."

Indigenous Services Canada spokesperson Rola Tfaili said the department monitors and tracks multiple sources of information, while protecting patient privacy and confidentiality, for reporting on new cases of COVID-19, including those among First Nations people on reserve.

"Provinces and territories don't require individuals to self-identify when testing at their provincial or territorial test centres," said Tfaili in an email to CBC News.

"While ISC tracks the sources of information available, all test samples are analyzed by the provincial health system laboratories and the authority for publicly sharing information on the confirmed cases of COVID-19 for individuals living off reserve rests with the provinces and territories, as well as the Public Health Agency of Canada."

Concerns about confidentiality have been echoed by some First Nations leaders, including the First Nations Health Authority in British Columbia, in why they are not disclosing the locations of COVID-19 cases.

But for Skye, the lack of data being made public is what fosters stigma.

"If people aren't empowered with actual reliable data, stigma is a consequence," she said.

"People feel like they have this vigilante mentality because their systems of structures are failing them at providing them information."

ISC said efforts are being made to make more data available online.

Skye said access to more information, whether reported by ISC or mainstream media, will improve basic decision-making.

"One of the things that's hardest for average people in a community is to have the information available to them so they can accurately assess their own situation," said Skye.

"People and families want to be able to assess their own risk or meet their own needs. If people aren't aware how many cases locally are happening, they're not going to know whether or not they should go shopping or going out to do all of these things to get meals.

"If you're not aware of cases in your community, you're just having this spectre of fear, as opposed to knowledge."

AFN launches task force

Manitoba Regional Chief Kevin Hart said First Nations need to be involved in "every step of the way" of the pandemic response, and that includes data collection and data sharing for informed decision-making.

Hart is the co-chair of the Assembly of First Nations' (AFN) newly established national task force on COVID-19. The goal is to help First Nations receive accurate information, analysis and recommendations throughout the pandemic.

"Data has always been something that has been sought after. We as First Nations are at the federal government's mercy when it comes to data collection," said Hart.

He said leadership needs proper data to be able to advise their citizens when it comes to the different states of emergencies that are being enacted across the country.

He also holds the emergency management portfolio for AFN, and said he's advocating for both on and off-reserve members.

"Here in Manitoba, we have one of the highest urban [Indigenous] populations in Canada — upwards of 100,000 Indigenous people including 75,000 First Nations people.

"There's a lot of people that we see are falling through the cracks. We want to ensure everyone out there are properly being resourced."

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/coronavirus-indigenous-data-gap-1.5556676>

### **Advocates concerned child abuse going unreported with schools closed**

**CTV NEWS - May 5, 2020**

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/advocates-concerned-child-abuse-going-unreported-with-schools-closed-1.4926814>

TORONTO -- The overriding public health advice is to stay at home, where it is safest. But for far too many Canadian children, home means facing a different danger altogether.

Family members are responsible for nearly a third of all violence against children and youth. With schools closed for weeks now, there are fears about what might be happening to at-risk kids who now have nowhere to escape to.

Chanice McAnuff has an insight into just how high the stakes are -- she escaped an abusive home when she was a child.

Now a psychology major at university, she is raising the alarm on behalf of children who can't. She told CTV News that what frightens her is the thought of "what's happening behind closed doors.

"School was definitely a getaway place for me," she said. "Home was not a safe place."

McAnuff was rescued with the help of police and her school, which are the two agencies that most often warn children's aid about potential abuse.

"There is an acute concern happening right now [because] ... the eyes of the community are not on our children in the way that they used to be before the state of emergency was called," said Nicole Bonnie, CEO of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

There has been a staggering 40-per-cent reduction in calls to the Children's Society compared to last year.

"With children not being in classrooms, we are certainly seeing a reduction in referrals from schools and school boards," Bonnie told CTV News.

There is a narrow window into a child's home life that teachers can still peer through: virtual classrooms. And children's aid agencies are handing out hundreds of electronic lifelines to keep children connected with those outside of their home.

“We have been able to provide families with iPads, with cellphones in order to support them, [to] mitigate risk,” said Bonnie, stressing that they want to be able to communicate with at-risk children.

Meanwhile, some agencies, such as Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services, which focuses on protecting Indigenous youth, are re-working how they do their jobs.

“At the beginning of the pandemic measures, we went to virtual ways of connecting, as well as through windows, through doors, in driveways, in yards,” executive director Amber Crowe told CTV News.

“But now we are reinstating in-person services on a wider basis and we are having to use PPE in some circumstances.”

Ontario announced today that it would be expanding online mental health services, including the national Kids Help Phone line, which has seen a 400 percent increase in calls since the pandemic began.

The number to call Kids Help Phone is 1-800-668-6868.

### **Alberta suspends some environmental monitoring at 16 oilsands projects due to COVID-19 GLOBAL NEWS - May 6, 2020**

<https://globalnews.ca/news/6909862/oilsands-monitoring-suspended-covid-19/>

The Alberta Energy Regulator has suspended more than a dozen environmental rules at 16 different oilsands projects after four major companies in the Canadian oil patch asked for relief amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The regulator, an independent provincial organization which acts as an industry watchdog, told Global News in a statement that companies would still have to collect most of the monitoring information required previously.

But it said that a number of requirements to monitor air, water and wildlife would be suspended in order to help contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The watchdog declined to provide further details of how it determined that some monitoring activity would be risky, but noted that it would continue to monitor and inspect energy sites.

Coronavirus outbreak: Trudeau says COVID-19 can't cause us to forget climate change, the 'other' global crisis

The regulator described the rule changes on its website as “unilateral” amendments to previously approved conditions of 16 different oilsands mining and in situ projects operated by Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. (CNRL), Imperial Oil, Suncor and Syncrude.

The rule changes also coincided with a Canadian Press report that 50 birds had died after landing on a tailings pond near an oilsands site operated by one of the companies that was granted relief, Imperial Oil.

Among the temporary changes, enacted on April 29 and May 1, the companies would no longer have to take some surface and groundwater samples around plants, or measure toxic pollution from stacks. They would also be allowed to suspend some monitoring by contractors of sulphur and volatile organic compound emissions.

In addition, the oil majors would be allowed to temporarily overlook requirements to monitor wildlife, birds and wetlands, including some monitoring of animals that require the use of cameras or recording devices as well as field work to monitor rare plants.

“Surveillance and monitoring by operators and the AER continues to ensure safe and responsible operations of all facilities,” the regulator told Global News in a statement on Thursday. “We anticipate that the amendments will be in place long as the public orders issued under the Public Health Act remain in effect.”

The regulator also said it was in “regular contact” with industry representatives, including lobby groups such as the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Explorers and Producers Association of Canada.

It declined to respond to a question about whether it had consulted First Nations, which have agreements with companies about operations and could be impacted by the reduction in monitoring.

The rule changes also coincided with a Canadian Press report that 50 birds had died after landing on a tailings pond near an oilsands site operated by one of the companies that was granted relief, Imperial Oil.

The World Health Organization has warned that air pollution could exacerbate the severity of COVID-19, and one preliminary analysis from researchers at Harvard University, not yet peer-reviewed, has found that exposure to air pollution can increase COVID-19 mortality rates.

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Chief Allan Adam said the reduction in monitoring was of “grave concern” to his nation, and he called on the regulator to review its decision.

“There should never be a choice between protecting the health and safety of those workers and protecting the environment and the health of First Nations people,” he said in a statement.

“Neither of these are negotiable. Had we been consulted on this decision, we would have strongly objected to the false choices that the Alberta Energy Regulator is asking Albertans to make.”

Earlier this spring, Premier Jason Kenney’s cabinet used its emergency powers under the COVID-19 crisis to suspend some environmental reporting requirements for a number of industries, but it said at the time that monitoring work would continue.

CNRL didn’t respond to a request for comment, but the three other companies affected by the recent decisions said that they requested the relief from environmental monitoring due to worker safety concerns as the deadly COVID-19 disease continues to spread around the world.

A few hundred kilometres south of the oilsands projects, other employers in the food industry are fighting major outbreaks of COVID-19 at a pair of Alberta meatpacking plants, Cargill and JBS. The outbreaks have been linked to at least two deaths, prompting provincial occupational health and safety investigations.

Oilsands companies, which include camps with thousands of workers, some of whom fly in and out from different regions, have only reported one smaller outbreak of COVID-19 since the pandemic struck Canada.

Both Suncor and Syncrude told Global News that they had scaled down some production since March, reducing the number of workers on project sites and implementing changes in transportation to promote more physical distancing for workers en route.

“Suncor has worked with its vendors, contractors and local government agencies to ensure we’re appropriately following physical distance guidelines,” said Suncor spokesperson Erin Rees. “As a part of this work, we made requests to the AER to postpone some monitoring in order to protect workers and the public from COVID-19 and specifically to ensure public health guidance is respected.”

“To be clear — all requests for postponement of monitoring were due to the number of people required to perform the work, impacting our ability to ensure physical distancing.”

The extra challenges also coincide with a challenging global market that has caused many companies to suffer losses as demand for oil plummets around the world in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Syncrude, which has previously reported two cases of COVID-19, said its request for regulatory relief is part of a large suite of measures to scale back non-essential operations, and prevent further spread of the virus.

“We’re not asking that these [environmental rules] be permanently stopped,” Syncrude spokesman Will Gibson told Global News.

“We’re just saying right now, during COVID, the priority should be health and safety of people that work on our sites.”

There have been at least 19 cases of COVID-19, traced back to the Kearl Lake work camp, operated by Imperial Oil.

When asked about the environmental rule changes, Imperial Oil spokesperson Jon Harding said that the company’s focus, throughout the pandemic, was on the health and safety of its workforce.

A lot of the rule changes are similar to a list of requests made by the industry lobby group CAPP in a letter to federal cabinet ministers that was leaked to Global News in April. The letter prompted one environmentalist to accuse the industry of taking advantage of the pandemic to eliminate rules it doesn’t like.

Environmental monitoring in the oilsands has been a sensitive political issue ever since 2008, when 1,600 oil-soaked ducks were found dead after landing in a tailings pond. The incident created a public relations nightmare for industry, generating international headlines and turning the oilsands into a frequent target of activists from around the world.

But the duck deaths also helped prompt the federal and provincial governments to create a multimillion-dollar joint scientific monitoring program, funded by industry, as part of efforts to show that development was proceeding in a responsible manner.

It wasn’t immediately clear whether the Alberta Energy Regulator’s recent decisions would affect any federal environmental laws or the joint oilsands monitoring program.

Environment and Climate Change Canada didn’t immediately respond to questions about the Alberta rule changes.

While the oil patch is getting some relief due to the risks of COVID-19, the Kenney government indicated that Alberta was succeeding in efforts to curb the spread of the disease and ready to start reopening parts of the economy.

Premier Jason Kenney had noted on April 30 that the province had prevented COVID-19 from overwhelming the province’s health-care system. He also pointed to Alberta’s aggressive testing measures and the province’s ability to identify outbreaks and then contain them.

But he said the reopening would be contingent on the province continuing to be able to keep case numbers from overwhelming the system, and that Albertans would need to remain vigilant in following public health orders and recommendations.

“Your efforts and tremendous sacrifices have so far succeeded in containing the spread of the virus far below the devastating scale of the outbreak in many other places, and well below the capacity of our health-care system to look after vulnerable Albertans,” he said.

“Our success has been built on a sound pandemic response plan, implemented by Dr. [Deena] Hinshaw and our team at Alberta Health, who saw COVID-19 coming before many others did. “They acted quickly and prudently to ensure our stockpile of medical supplies and aggressive testing regime would be the best in Canada, and among the very best in the world.”