

Mysterious rash outbreak in northern Kashechewan

By Jim Windle

KASHECHEWAN – The northern Ontario community of Kashechewan has already been described by Canadian Family Magazine as one of Canada's most desperate and neglected reserves. Now, yet another curse has befallen the people of Kashechewan.

After years of battling the federal government under Stephen Harper over flooding, mold in most homes, sewage, water, suicide, displacement and a myriad of other social and environmental issues, the community is now dealing with strange and serious skin conditions springing up in children especially.

Locals believe the source a result of the community's contaminated water, but Federal Health Minister Jane Philpott says an outbreak is not related to the community's water at all.

"The water has been tested as recently as last

Tuesday and we know that it meets all of the appropriate standards for safety in drinking water and for water to be used for other purposes," Philpott told the CBC Monday.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler is not accepting the Minister's conclusion.

"I think if you spoke with a council member of a community member from Kash they would tell you differently," he says. "What we hear today is that community members are to the point now where they don't trust the water coming from their taps to even bathe or do their laundry, so I think there's a real need for an independent and outside assessment and inspection of their water system."

So far three children have developed a serious, scabby rash covering most of their faces. One of the three is recovering from recent heart surgery. Another is an infant niece of former Kasheche-

wan chief, Derek Stephen. All three are receiving treatment in a Timmons hospital. To date no cause has been identified.

NDP MP Charlie Angus whose riding of Timmins-James Bay gathered with ministerial officials and aboriginal leaders Monday to discuss the situation in depth.

"The pictures of those children were so shocking and so heartbreaking that it woke Canadians up across the country," Angus told media. "They were saying, 'What the hell is happening in our country that children are getting sick like this?' These children really are the face of a much larger systemic crisis that is facing northern First Nation communities."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, during question period on Monday, pointed to Tuesday's budget which he says will contain "historic" investments to address indigenous issues in general and in specific.



A mysterious skin rash has broken out in the Northern Ontario community of Kashechewan. Children are beginning to develop ugly and painful skin rashes. Although locals believe the cause of the outbreak is contaminated water, Federal Health Minister Jane Philpott says the outbreak is not related to the community's water at all. PHOTOS BY DEREK STEPHEN