

Children treated for skin conditions on troubled Ontario reserve

OTTAWA -First Nations children suffering from skin rashes in a northern Ontario community are being treated by a team of doctors, but their struggle speaks to much deeper systemic problems, says the local MP.

Three children in Kashechewan First Nation

were taken from the community for medical treatment last week after they developed painful sores on their bodies.

This came after the images of the children were circulated widely on social media.

Thirteen other children were expected to be flown out for

assessment and possible treatment, but physicians were able to assist them on the reserve.

Charlie Angus, the NDP MP for the area, said he is pleased by the response, but there is remaining frustration in the community about deplorable living con-

ditions.

"The community is flooded out year after year, the houses are substandard because of the damage they've suffered," Angus said.

"This is what Third World poverty looks like when it is inflicted on children."

The children being treated now may very well be sitting in an evacuation centre far from their home in mere weeks, Angus added.

"The problem we have is that this happens year after year," he said.

In a statement Thursday, Health Minister Jane Philpott said she has been very con-

cerned about the health of Kashechewan children.

She said she has been in frequent contact with Health Canada officials who have been working closely with community leaders to provide immediate care.

"In the last two days, a medical team led by Dr. Gordon Green of Weeneebayko Area Health Authority was on the ground in Kashechewan examining more than 30 children and ensuring care for those who require it," Philpott said.

"I spoke with Dr. Green yesterday and he informed me that he and his team of

physicians and nurses diagnosed the vast majority of children examined with eczema. There are also a few cases of scabies, impetigo and psoriasis."

These skin conditions are fully treatable and the children are getting the treatment they require, she added, noting a member of the medical team will return in two to three weeks to follow up.

While recent testing has confirmed the drinking water falls within established guidelines, there will be additional independent testing conducted, Philpott noted.

"While I am relieved to know there is no immediate medical emergency in the community, the situation in Kashechewan is another troubling reminder of the many social and health challenges that are faced by many First Nation and Inuit communities," she said.

"As a physician, I find it unacceptable that these conditions exist in a nation as rich as Canada. I have spoken to First Nations leaders who are deeply concerned for their people, but just as deeply committed to finding real, lasting solutions."

The Canadian Red Cross said Thursday it is engaged in a dialogue with various government and community agencies as the needs in Kashechewan are being assessed.