

ROUND DANCE

Feast Protocols



Feast (*Adapted from SICCC's – Cultural Teachings: First Nations Protocols and Methodologies*)

Saskatchewan Indigenous protocols for feasts differ by community but are similar. In general, the conduct of a feast is at the direction of the Elder leading the ceremony.

The offering of food is an important spiritual practice that is intended to look after relatives that have gone before us. Special pipe ceremonies and prayers are conducted with this offering of food.

Prayers at feasts are given for good life, health, well-being, happiness and other blessings. Feasts also accompany other ceremonies such as the Sundance, Smoking Lodge, Prairie Chicken Dance, Horse Dance, Give Away Dance, Ghost Dance and Round Dance.

Usually soup, bannock, tea and some types of berries are served at feasts. In the past, the soup would normally have been bison. In addition to these standard items, today a range of other foods is served at feasts.

People attending a feast will sit on the ground or floor forming a circle with the Elder/Knowledge Keeper leading the ceremony. Traditionally, most people sit on the ground or floor unless there are health or disability reasons. The elderly can sit on chairs. The feast begins with prayers and a pipe ceremony conducted by the lead Elder assisted by a helper. It is disrespectful for anyone to speak while the Elder is praying and avoid any unnecessary movement.

Following the prayers and pipe ceremony the Elder will direct the servers to begin distributing the food offerings to the people. It is a strong protocol that no one eats the food placed before them until directed by the Elder. The Elder will wait until all have been served before giving this direction.

People are expected to accept all food offered to them and not to refuse anything. The feast food given and not eaten by a participant at the event should be taken home to be eaten later. Food that is taken home from a feast and not eaten should have a tobacco offering and be burned or placed on clean ground.

Feast participants often bring their own 'sitting blankets', storage containers and bags, tea towels and utensils. A 'sitting blanket' is for comfort when a person sits on the floor or the ground.

Appropriate and respectful conduct at feasts is essential because of the sacred items present. An individual is expected to show respect by abstaining from drugs or alcohol prior to attending a ceremony.

For women, expectations include wearing a longer dress or skirt to feasts and other ceremonies, whether as a participant or observer. The length of the dress should reach below the knee or to ankle length. Women are encouraged to sit with feet together and legs to the side or with your feet underneath, whichever is comfortable.

The conduct and protocol for men at a feast, whether as participants or observers, is to assist the infirm or the elderly with chairs and various other tasks when asked. Generally, men are expected to remove their hats during the feast especially during prayer and drumming. Men generally are encouraged to wear ribbon shirts (if they have), especially the servers or helpers. The task of serving the food offerings is usually given to those men who have the experience and knowledge to do so.