



*Raising the physical,  
mental, social, and spiritual  
health of American Indians  
and Alaska Natives to the  
highest level*



# Indian Health Service/California Area Office Patient Newsletter

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## Director's Message

### Affordable Care Act

Health insurance coverage is a wonderful investment in your future and a fantastic benefit. It is easy to enroll by phone or internet: 1-800-300-1506 or visit the Marketplace <https://www.coveredca.com/>

For many American Indians of certain income levels, this coverage is available to you with no out-of-pocket costs, such as deductibles, copayments and coinsurance. You can also take advantage of special cost and eligibility rules for MediCal and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) that make it easier to qualify for these programs. Only one application is necessary for applying to all three programs – MediCal, Covered California and CHIP.

These programs provide a vast array of comprehensive healthcare services, often increasing choices and access to care. For example, individuals can potentially access specialty care at no cost in a nearby healthcare program that accepts the insurance purchased in the Marketplace.

Of course, you can continue to get care at your current tribal or urban Indian healthcare program. The insurance program does not reduce the federal responsibility in providing healthcare for tribes. Nor will the HIS go away. Simply it represents additional benefits to our patients as part of that responsibility.

Your tribal or urban healthcare program can also benefit if you sign-up for healthcare insurance at the Marketplace. If a clinic is able to bill another insurance company, their resources may increase and services could be expanded for everyone.

One final point – remember that American Indians are not restricted to specified enrollment deadlines that apply to non-Indians. You can enroll at any time, by phone, internet or in person.

If you have questions and/or need assistance in accessing the internet, contact your local tribal or urban healthcare program. Certified enrollment clerks are available that can assist you.

Please take a look and see what options are available to you. Examine how you can benefit yourself, family members, your clinic and your community. Check out Covered California now: 1-800-300-1506 or <https://www.coveredca.com/>.



## Traditional Food: Seaweed By Helen Maldonado, PA-C, CDE



Being a Coastal Pomo woman, I am still drawn to the rocks every March to harvest seaweed. We make it a family gathering and invite one or two close Native friends. This year I took my life-long friend and she said she had a great time. She remembers collecting seaweed with her Mom, but hasn't been since she was a little girl. The trail was very steep with soft, moist soil underfoot. The safest way to descend is sitting down and scooting. When you get to the smooth rocks with the beautiful seaweed hanging off the edges, it feels like you have found a treasure. Pulling the seaweed by the fistful feels like it stretches slightly then snaps, leaving the plant still connected to the rock. It's good for our people to do this, as it is actually pruning the seaweed to help it grow better. This year, our favorite place to harvest

was barren, with no seaweed on any rocks. That was truly sad, but due to the relentless scouting by my sister-in-law, we struck gold. Getting back up the bluff must have burned a few hundred calories for the seaweed pickers.

Our people ate seaweed in the past as a source of salt. Now we don't require this as a source of salt or iodine, but many of our people continue to gather and eat the seaweed. It's a different species of seaweed than the one used in sushi dishes, but it tastes the same. Once we gather the seaweed, we will lay it in the sun until it is completely dried. Then we store it in paper bags in the pantry or cupboard.

When we are ready to eat it, we prepare it by flash frying; this takes a lot of practice to get it just right because it can easily be burned or undercooked. A healthier method some people try is baking it with a sprinkle of olive oil. Either way produces a crunchy addition to our meals. I recommended eating it with a homemade tortilla and either fish or abalone. Happy harvesting!



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## Stop the Spread of Germs and Avoid Illnesses: Wash Your Hands! By Christine Brennan, MPH

One of the most effective methods for preventing illness, especially the cold and flu, is to properly wash your hands often. Washing your hands regularly and after certain activities is one of the easiest and best ways to avoid getting sick and to prevent the spread of germs to others.

You should wash your hands several times during the day, but especially before, during, or after these activities:

- After using the toilet
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has gone to the bathroom
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- Before, during, or after food preparation
- Before eating food
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- Before or after treating a wound
- After touching an animal, animal food, or animal waste
- After touching garbage

How you wash your hands is just as important as how often. Improper hand washing can result in the spread of germs. It is important to use soap when washing hands because soap helps remove the germs and soil from the

skin. Many soaps contain antibacterial ingredients, but studies have shown there is no added benefit to using these soaps; plain soap works just as well.

Proper hand washing requires five steps:

- **Wet** your hands with clean, running water, then turn off the tap and apply soap
- **Lather** your hands by rubbing them together with soap. Make sure to lather all areas of the hands (between fingers, the backs of your hand, and under nails)
- **Scrub** your hands for 20 seconds (try singing the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end, twice)
- **Rinse** your hands under clean, running water
- **Dry** your hands with an air dryer or clean towel

If you don't have access to clean, running water and soap, you can use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Studies have shown that hand sanitizers with a 60% to 95% alcohol concentration are the most effective. Hand sanitizers will reduce the number of germs on hands, but they do not get rid of all types of germs. To properly use hand sanitizer, apply the liquid or gel to the palm of one hand and rub your hands together, covering all surfaces until your hands are dry.



## Measles: Why is this Vaccine Preventable Disease Still Circulating? By Susan Ducore, RN, MSN

Measles is a highly contagious, yet very preventable respiratory disease caused by a virus. Another name for the disease is rubeola. It spreads through the air by cough or a sneeze by someone ill with the disease. Measles virus causes fever, runny nose, cough and a rash all over the body. In the year 2000, likely due to high vaccine coverage, measles was declared eliminated in the United States. Since that time, there have been infrequent cases of the disease in this country.

In late March of this year, the California Director of Public Health and state health officer said, "Being fully vaccinated against measles does more than just protect the person who receives the vaccination- it also protects their family and friends, including children who may be too young to be vaccinated." The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention report that measles kills an estimated 164,000 people each year around the world. As of March 2014, a California Department of Public Health Press release indicates that 49 cases of measles have been in California.

If you, a friend or family member have any of the following symptoms, please contact your tribal or urban Indian healthcare provider immediately:

- Blotchy rash

- Fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Feeling run down, achy (malaise)
- Tiny white spots with bluish-white centers found inside the mouth (Koplik's spots)

To prevent measles, talk to your healthcare provider about what you can do ensure that you and your children are protected against the measles virus. Children are recommended to get their first dose of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine at 12 to 15 months. The second dose of MMR is usually administered before children start kindergarten at 4 to 6 years. Also, talk to your healthcare provider if you are planning to travel overseas

For more information, visit:

Immunization Action Coalition: Unprotected People Reports: Measles <http://www.immunize.org/reports/measles.asp>

## Good News Supporting Healthy Lifestyles By Beverly Calderon, RD, CDE

Improving health requires various factors because of its many elements. One factor to improve health is promoting positive changes and healthier lifestyles to help lower the risks of many chronic diseases. For many, successful health outcomes, including reversal of chronic health issues, are linked to physical activity and nutrition. In March, National Nutrition Month honored the importance of

food preferences, health concerns, lifestyles, cultures, and traditions as factors in eating healthy. Everyone should be encouraged to eat healthy food and participate in regular physical activity to support their health and reduce their risk of chronic illness. Just as many chronic disease risk factors begin early in life, many of the risk factors can be reduced early in life too, with healthy eating and regular physical activity habits. In May, National Physical Fitness and Sports Month will celebrate the benefits of regular physical activity for people of all ages. Native communities are promoting physical activity year round as part of the national Just Move It campaign. On the Just Move It website, individuals share what works at the local level, tell their stories, and learn together. This Spring marks the ninth year that the IHS California Area Office is encouraging tribal and urban Indian healthcare programs, along with their communities, to become Just Move It partners. By focusing on what is working, they share community-based physical activity stories. This is good news supporting healthy lifestyles.

For more information, visit:

**Just Move It:** <https://www.justmoveit.org/jmi/>

**Let's Move:** <http://www.letsmove.gov/>





## CONTACT

Indian Health Service/  
California Area Office  
650 Capitol Mall,  
Suite 7-100  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Phone: (916) 930-3927



## Drought Preparation—Conserving Water in Your Home By Lisa Nakagawa, MPH

To check for leaks in your water line, start by turning off all faucets and water using appliances. Read the dial on the meter and record the reading. Recheck after 15-20 minutes. If no water has been used and the reading has changed, a leak is occurring somewhere in the plumbing system. The services of a plumber or water utility employee may be needed to fix and locate the leaks.

Here are other water conservation tips:

### Kitchen

- Run the dishwasher only when it is full to save water
- Install aerators on the kitchen faucet to reduce flows to less than 1 gallon per minute
- Wash fruits and vegetables in a pan of water instead of running water from the tap
- Don't use running water to thaw food; defrost food in the refrigerator
- Fill a basin or sink with soapy water instead of letting the water run continuously when washing dishes by hand

### Bathroom

- Install aerators on bathroom faucets to reduce flows to 1.2 gallons per person/day
- Turn water off when brushing teeth; this saves about 10 gallons/day
- Test toilets for leaks by putting food coloring in the tank; if it seeps into the bowl without flushing, there is a leak

### Outside

- Only water the lawn when necessary. If the lawn and flower beds need water, only do so once a week. When watering grass, put down no more than 1 inch each week. This can be determined by setting out an empty clear container marked at 1 inch and letting it fill
- Set lawn mower blades to 2-3 inches high. Longer grass shades the soil improving moisture retention and helps to develop a deeper root system
- Apply mulch around shrubs and flower beds to reduce evaporation and control weeds
- Use a broom instead of a hose to clean walkways, driveways, and entrances



### Laundry

- Wash only full loads of laundry. If you must wash partial loads, match the load setting with the amount of laundry
- Wash dark clothes in cold water to save water and energy and help clothes retain their color

For more information, visit:

<http://www.ihs.gov/california/index.cfm/offices/office-of-environmental-health-engineering-oehe/drought-2014/>

## Linking Poor Oral Health to Poor General Health By Steve Riggio, DDS

Periodontal Disease (gum disease) may contribute to other health risks. Periodontal Disease often begins with gingivitis, which is the mild inflammation of the gums. The signs and symptoms of gingivitis include swelling, bleeding, and redness and tenderness in the gum tissues. Gingivitis can be prevented by removing plaque through regular brushing and the use of dental floss. Plaque is a buildup of food and bacteria on the teeth. If plaque is not removed, it can harden and becomes tartar. Tartar build-up can lead to a more serious infection called periodontitis. Periodontitis can cause the loss of teeth and bone. Smoking can contribute to the severity of periodontal disease as smoking decreases oxygen to the gums and makes them more susceptible to infections.

Evidence suggest that periodontitis may be associated with other systemic (whole body) diseases. For example, there is a known link between diabetes and gum disease. People with

diabetes are more susceptible to gum disease and it can put them at great risk of diabetic complications. Some research has found that periodontitis is associated with cardiovascular disease, stroke, and bacterial pneumonia. Other research suggests that pregnant women with periodontitis may be at increased risk for delivering babies that are pre-term, have low birth weight, or both.

Given the potential link between periodontitis and systemic diseases, preventing periodontitis may be an important step in maintaining overall health. In most cases, this can be accomplished by good daily oral hygiene (brushing and flossing) and regular professional care. Make sure to tell your dentist about changes in your health including any recent illness or chronic conditions. Also, provide your dentist with a medication list of both prescriptions and over-the-counter products.