



July 6, 2020

Dear Tribal and Urban Indian Organization Leaders:

I trust that everyone had a safe and healthy holiday weekend celebrating our country's independence. As we start spending more time outdoors this summer, I want to remind everyone to enjoy the season with safety in mind. I encourage everyone to maintain their own health by getting enough sleep and exercise and following the [CDC guidelines to prevent infection](#).

Last week, the U.S. Surgeon General Vice Admiral Jerome Adams, released a PSA [reminding everyone to do their part to stay healthy](#) and help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by: following federal, state and local guidelines; taking extra precautions if you are at [higher risk](#) for severe illness; washing your hands frequently and thoroughly; and staying six feet away from others when you can, and wear a face covering in public especially when you cannot social distance.

Staying healthy also means understanding the dangers of hand sanitizers that contain methanol or wood alcohol. The Food and Drug Administration recently warned consumers about alcohol based hand sanitizers that can be toxic when absorbed through the skin or life threatening when ingested. The FDA has seen an increase in hand sanitizer products that are labeled to contain ethanol (also known as ethyl alcohol) but that have tested positive for methanol contamination. A list of hand sanitizers that have been recalled can be found [here](#).

On July 2, the IHS released the policy establishing the national [Community Health Aide Program \(CHAP\)](#). The CHAP is a multidisciplinary system of mid-level behavioral, community, and dental health professionals working alongside licensed providers to offer patients increased access to quality care in rural and remote communities. I want to extend gratitude to the [CHAP Tribal Advisory Group \(TAG\)](#) for their continued commitment in ensuring we continue to raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level. The IHS is taking a phased implementation approach by prioritizing items that are necessary to position tribal and federal programs for success. This includes investing in tribal programs, IHS certification boards, and training. Our next steps include initiating tribal consultation on the \$5 million from the IHS Fiscal Year 2020 budget to support the

implementation. We aim to continue working with our CHAP TAG on prioritizing these implementation components. The CHAP policy may be accessed under the [Indian Health Manual under Circular 20-06](#).

On July 1, I provided testimony before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the IHS [response and mitigation efforts to the COVID-19 pandemic](#). I detailed our COVID-19 response efforts and also provided testimony on S.3650 or Coverage for Urban Indian Health Providers Act. The IHS endorses the policy to extend Federal Tort Claims Act coverage to urban Indian organizations. I also thanked the Committee for their continued partnership and engagement in working together to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the support of Congress, the IHS has allocated nearly \$2 billion to IHS, tribal, and urban Indian health programs to prepare for and respond to the Coronavirus.

Last week, I visited the Phoenix Indian Medical Center where I had the opportunity to meet with employees, many on the front lines, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. While these are tough times in our world, in our communities, and in our workplaces, the [Phoenix Indian Medical Center](#) Public Health Service Bravos shares this [message of hope](#). I am grateful for the amazing team members at the PIMC and across the Indian health system of care for their dedication and hard work, especially during these difficult times.

During my visit to the PIMC, I also joined Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie for a roundtable where we discussed cross-coordination efforts between the Phoenix VA Health Care System and PIMC on how we can work together to address the needs of our veterans. The [VA - IHS partnership](#) aims to provide Native veterans with access to care close to their homes and promotes cultural competence in quality health care. I thank Secretary Wilkie for his commitment to our Native veterans.

Last month, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar and I visited the Oneida Nation in Wisconsin to see and hear first-hand their experiences in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. We met with the Oneida leadership and toured the Oneida Community Health Center. Their response efforts are an example of our self-governance tribes doing great work caring for and treating our American Indian and Alaska Native patients. Thank you to the Oneida Nation for hosting us. The Secretary and I appreciate your commitment to the IHS mission and providing quality health care to our patients.

Finally, I want to share a [great resource](#) from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Children's Bureau that brings together tribal child welfare professionals through virtual peer

groups to share and learn from one another as they work to enhance their disaster response plans and phased recovery process with staff, children, and families.

We are committed to continuing these messages through the duration of the pandemic on a bi-weekly basis. Thank you to those who have provided feedback and have shared that these emails have been valuable and provide a great compendium of information and resources. Your feedback on how we can further improve this communication is always welcome.

In closing, I want to acknowledge our IHS team. We are treating each and every patient with culturally competent, patient-centered, relationship-based care. As we look to recover from COVID-19, the IHS is supporting the emotional well-being and mental health of our workforce and the communities that we serve, providing services that draw from a long history of cultural resilience among American Indians and Alaska Natives. Across the Indian health system, crucial services are being delivered under extraordinary circumstances. I look forward to future engagements with you and encourage you to continue checking our [IHS Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up to date information on our COVID-19 response activities.

Respectfully,

Michael

RADM Michael D. Weahkee, MBA, MHSA
Assistant Surgeon General, U.S. Public Health Service
Director, Indian Health Service

Below is general information on various topics that could be of interest to you and your community. Web links are included where you can find more information on each topic.

Testing/Supplies/Contact Tracing Resources:

- [CDC Social Media toolkit](#)
- [CDC New Guidance for K-12 schools](#)
- [CDC Updated Clinical Care Guidance](#)
- [CDC Updated Training Information for Healthcare Professionals](#)
- [CDC Updated Guidance for staff at local and state health departments, infection prevention and control professionals, and healthcare personnel](#)
- [CDC Strategies to Optimize supplies of facemasks in healthcare settings](#)
- [CDC Guidance on the Importance of cloth face coverings](#)

[CMS Updated Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) on COVID-19](#)