



March 16, 2020

Dear Tribal and Urban Indian Organization Leaders:

I want to thank you for joining the Indian Health Service on last week's All Tribal and Urban Indian Organization Leader Call to discuss COVID-19, the illness caused by a new coronavirus. During the call, tribal leaders voiced concerns related to availability of testing, accessing supplies, and funding sources. This weekly call will continue to serve as a resource for all of Indian Country as we work to provide you with the latest information and hear directly from you, regarding your questions and concerns about the coronavirus' impact on your community. In addition, this weekly e-mail will provide regular updates on behalf of the entire Department of Health and Human Services, pulling together resources and information from across the Department for Tribes to receive in one place.

I want to assure you that all IHS facilities that would normally provide testing for illnesses have access to testing for patients that may have COVID-19. Samples are collected using standard, readily available swabs. The samples are then submitted to public health laboratories for testing. This is the standard testing procedure across the country, not unique to IHS. Specimens are being tested at 81 public health laboratories in all 50 states plus Washington, DC. As of late last week, no lab has reported interrupting testing due to a lack of supplies or reagents. IHS is also able to send specimens to commercial laboratories as they begin to offer COVID-19 testing. At this time, these labs have excess capacity to perform tests. The FDA has opened a [24/7 help line](#) to assist clinical laboratories, provider institutions, and test developers with any issues they are having with testing, including getting access to supplies needed for specimen collection and test performance.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued [new guidance regarding large events and mass gatherings](#), which can contribute to the spread of COVID-19 in the United States via travelers who attend these events and introduce the virus to new communities. CDC recommends that for the next 8 weeks, organizers, whether groups or individuals, cancel or postpone in-person events that consist of 50 people or more throughout the United States. Other CDC resources you may find useful are [Public Health Communicators Get Your Community Ready for COVID-19](#) and [Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of](#)

[Persons with Potential COVID-19 Exposures](#). I encourage you to explore these resources and to continue checking the CDC website for up-to-date information at cdc.gov/covid19.

You can also sign up to receive [weekly emails from the CDC](#) about the COVID-19 outbreak, and you can add content from CDC's COVID-19 website to your tribal nation's or urban Indian organization website using [CDC's content syndication services](#).

As we continue to monitor the spread of the coronavirus, understanding that our elders and people with underlying conditions are most vulnerable, we are coordinating with the Administration for Community Living to ensure that Tribes are receiving the latest FAQs on Nutrition Services, Emergency Management, and Home and Community Based-Supportive Services. I have attached those FAQs to this email.

The IHS has posted a [document on our website](#) that answers many of the questions that we have received during our last two calls. We have also added a link at the top of the IHS.gov homepage that will take you to the latest COVID-19 info from IHS. We are communicating regularly with our health care providers, and continuing our biweekly call for all IHS employees to ensure they are receiving the most up-to-date information available. We also encourage Tribes to continue to reach out to their [IHS Area Director](#) for any specific questions or concerns related to coronavirus.

IHS is working closely with the Department of Health and Human Services and CDC to determine how best to spend the minimum of \$40 million that was included in supplemental appropriations. Tribal leaders can provide input during the National Indian Health Board's listening session tomorrow, March 17, from 5:00-6:30 pm EDT and during our next [All Tribal and Urban Indian Organization Leader Call on Thursday, March 19, at 3:30 pm EDT](#). Thursday's call will include representatives from HHS, IHS, CDC, Department of Interior, Administration for Native Americans, FEMA, and the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. We will continue to provide weekly calls on COVID-19 for tribal and urban Indian organization leaders every Thursday until further notice.

Respectfully,

Michael

RADM Michael D. Weahkee, MBA, MHSA
Assistant Surgeon General, USPHS
Principal Deputy Director, IHS