



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

MAR 06 2020

Dear Tribal Leader:

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention have explained that there is no widespread transmission of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States at this time. President Trump established the [Corona virus Task Force](#), which is composed of professionals and medical experts who are focused on ensuring the health and safety of the American people. The lead agency coordinating the Federal response to COVID-19 is the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the CDC. The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is responsible for planning and coordinating DOI's support of that response.

All appropriate Departmental, Bureau, and Office personnel responsible for managing and supporting activities to prevent, protect against, mitigate, and respond to such hazards are actively engaged to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive Government-wide response.

I am actively working with my senior executive leaders to prepare employees for the spread of the virus in several ways. First, we are encouraging our employees and Tribal communities to know and follow best practices for preventing the spread of the virus. The CDC has a number of resources available to post and share in your communities online at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

Additional guidance on preventing COVID-19 spread in communities, including at schools, is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

Second, I have established an Indian Affairs (IA) COVID-19 Emergency Management Planning Team, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of IA's Pandemic Plan in the event the virus impacts the people or services IA supports. This team is evolving and will help my Office, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and the Office of Special Trustee for American Indians coordinate preparedness plans as necessary and provide information from DOI's OEM as it becomes available.

Third, the BIE is proactively preparing for and assisting schools with responding to a potential pandemic crisis in a manner that protects the health and safety of our students and staff. The BIE sent a *School Leader and Parent Letter* to the field that provides best practices for hygiene and where to find the most current information from the CDC. It also provides a point of contact for reporting local issues. The BIE is also reviewing their Pandemic Plan that includes guidance for preparation and coordination efforts, roles and responsibilities, continuity of student learning, and crisis communication as they pertain to the operations of BIE should a pandemic occur. The BIE is also working directly with schools in possible high impact areas to ensure local school administrators are reviewing their plans and familiarizing themselves in the event a case occurs.

Finally, the CDC has been asked for national guidance for detention facilities. The BIA correctional facilities managers and our Occupational Safety and Health personnel are in close coordination with the DOI Department Agency Safety and Health Official and their medical

professionals to minimize any disruption in service delivery of our programs. We are closely working with the CDC, Office of Personnel Management and the General Services Administration.

Indian Affairs is committed to minimizing the impact of COVID-19 on our employees and Tribal communities while continuing to ensure the continuity of operations. As we work in coordination with the Department, I am committed to sharing updated information with you so that we may:

- Support the communications efforts of DOI and other stakeholders regarding COVID-19.
- Provide and disseminate factual and concise information without creating panic or undue alarm.
- Dispel rumors and misinformation.
- Address concerns and fears.
- Keep communities informed of steps IA is taking.
- Be accessible to employees and stakeholders and address concerns in a timely and transparent manner.

I hope this information adds to your understanding of the issue and assures you my staff is doing all that we can to prepare for and diminish the potential impact of COVID-19. This is a rapidly evolving situation and there is still much to learn. The CDC recommends these basic prevention guidelines:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands;
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or utilize your elbow when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of the tissue and wash your hands again;
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces; and
- Most importantly, if your child has symptoms of the flu or of any serious infection or virus, please utilize your best judgement to determine if your child should stay home or consult a physician to avoid exposing others.
- Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed COVID-19 cases. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure and may include: fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

If your community is impacted, please notify your BIA regional office, which can be found on our website: <https://www.bia.gov/regional-offices>. This link and other resources can be found on <https://www.bia.gov/covid-19>. Please check this site for Indian Affairs updates.

As always, we stand ready to assist you in your efforts to keep your communities safe.

Sincerely,



Tara Sweeney
Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs