



National Indian Health Board
**NATIONAL TRIBAL
COVID-19 RESPONSE**

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04/10/2020

COVID-19 and Air Pollution

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness. This means that the disease targets the lungs and other parts of the respiratory system. Symptoms of COVID-19 include severe coughing and pneumonia, as well as non-respiratory impacts like fever. Because COVID-19 is a respiratory illness, [air pollution can make these symptoms much worse](#)—and possibly lead to death—for COVID patients.

Air pollution is very detrimental to health. It can harm people’s cardiovascular systems, brain development, reproductive health; and the exposure of pregnant women to air pollution has been associated with low birth weights. According to the [Intertribal Air Association](#), American Indian/Alaska Native children are 60% more likely to develop asthma than non-Hispanic white children. Air pollution is also [well known](#) to exacerbate respiratory illnesses like COVID-19, including:

- Asthma (which can also be made worse by [spring pollen](#))
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- Chronic Bronchitis
- Emphysema
- Lung Cancer
- Cystic Fibrosis/Bronchiectasis



Tribes and Air Pollution

Tribal communities are disproportionately exposed to outdoor air pollution, including from mining, industry, fossil fuels, and other sources that can originate on or off the reservation. Tribal homes with poor ventilation may also have higher levels of [indoor air pollution](#). Because of this increased exposure, Indian Country COVID patients may experience worse symptoms of the disease, and may be at increased risk of dying from it.

Tips for People with Respiratory Illness

People with preexisting respiratory illnesses should be very careful at all times during the pandemic. Follow guidance and take extra care to avoid contracting the virus. Scientific study on the virus is limited due to its newness, but multiple respiratory illnesses may compound each other and harm your lungs and respiratory system.

Additionally, if you live in an area with high air pollution and are at risk of contracting COVID-19, limit time outside and be sure to carry any emergency supplies related to your illness—an inhaler, for instance—with you at all times. Remember to clean these supplies in the appropriate manner if you do leave your home with them.

To view the current air quality in your area and to check for any air advisories, [click here](#).

For resources from the Environmental Protection Agency available to Tribes on air quality, [click here](#).

Disclaimer:
This fact sheet is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$2,000,000 with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

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