



National Indian Health Board NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

910 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE | Washington, D.C. 20003 | 202-507-4070 | www.nihb.org

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Obesity and COVID-19

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) is respiratory illness that was discovered in late 2019. Symptoms of COVID-19 may include fever, cough, and shortness of breath, and may appear 2-14 days after you've first been exposed to the virus.

While most people with COVID-19 are able to recover at home, people with obesity may be at a higher risk of serious health problems related to the disease. Additionally, people with obesity are often at higher risk of other chronic conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes, which can lead to worse COVID-19 outcomes. More than 50% of adults hospitalized with severe COVID-19 were obese. Next to heart disease, obesity is the second most common underlying condition in patients with severe COVID-19 symptomsⁱ.

Obesity disproportionately affects American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN). AI/AN adults are 50% more likely to have obesity compared to the general population. Approximately half of all AI/AN adults are diagnosed with obesityⁱⁱ.

How can I lower my risk?

Follow Social Distancing Guidelines

Many Tribes and states have implemented social distancing guidelines, asking people to avoid public situations where the virus may spread. The goal of social distancing is to avoid contact with someone who may be sick with COVID-19. If you have obesity, you should take extra care in following these guidelines.



- Stay home when possible.
- Ask your family or friends to help you with groceries and other needs, or see if your Tribe is offering any assistance for people with high-risk health conditions.
- If you have to go out in public put distance between yourself and other people to reduce your risk. Wear a mask in public places to protect others.
- Wash your hands frequently, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water is not available.

Work with your Healthcare Provider

If you are having symptoms such as a fever, cough, or shortness of breath, call your healthcare provider!

Seek medical help immediately if you have:

- Difficulty breathing
- Pain or pressure in your chest
- Confusion or trouble staying awake
- Bluish lips or face ⁱⁱ

Healthy Habits during COVID-19



Source: IHS DDTP

If you have been working on creating healthy habits, or have been trying to lose weight, it may be hard to continue these efforts during COVID-19. Many Tribes have closed their services, including gyms and nutrition programs, to protect citizens from COVID-19 exposure.

Talk to your healthcare provider, registered dietician, or your Tribal health department to ask about resources available to you. Additionally, see NIHB's material on Food Security and Nutrition and Gym Infection Control to identify additional steps you can take to eat healthy and exercise.

Remember that it is ok if your priorities change and you can't maintain all your healthy behaviors. Your other health needs, such as taking care of your family, protecting yourself from COVID-19, and managing your mental health may need to come first.

Physical Activity

Physical activity can help you stay healthy and feel good. There are many options for getting physical activity during this time. You can use YouTube to access free online classes, and use household items for weights. Yoga is a good option, and offers both physical and mental benefits. Catching up on your favorite TV shows? You can march in place or do squats and lunges while you watch. You can also go for a walk outside- just make sure you are physically distancing from other people.



Source: IHS DDTP



Eating Healthy

It may be challenging to eat healthy right now, particularly if you cannot go to the grocery store very often, or if you live far away from a store with healthy food. Try to stock up on healthy food that will last a long time such as beans, whole grain, and frozen or canned vegetables. If you have more free time, now is a great time to try new, healthy recipes. Reach out to your Tribe's health services to see what other resources are available to you.

Mental Health

Being isolated or afraid of COVID-19 can be difficult for many people, and it is normal to feel worried, sad, lonely, or confused. It is important to stay in contact with your loved ones through phone or email, and to do activities you enjoy or find relaxing. If you are struggling with managing your feelings, talk to your healthcare provider to get support from a professional. You can also call the Disaster Distress Helpline for support at 1-800-985-5990.