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Tribal Health Programs and Urban Indian Organizations Choose How They Will Access the COVID-19 Vaccine

The Department of Health and Human Services is laying the necessary groundwork for the distribution of a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine by ensuring that all tribal health programs and urban Indian organizations have the choice on how they receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Today, HHS is announcing that all tribal health programs and UIOs have chosen their preferred method for receiving the vaccine.

Tribal health programs and UIOs had the option of receiving the vaccine either through the Indian Health Service or their respective state. Once available, COVID-19 vaccines will be allocated to jurisdictions, including the IHS, who will then distribute to tribal health programs and UIOs.

“By offering Indian health providers a choice in how COVID-19 vaccines are delivered, the Trump Administration will ensure that vaccines are effectively delivered throughout Indian Country in ways that make sense for tribal communities,” said HHS Secretary Alex Azar. “Tribal nations have been a key part of our planning for the vaccine rollout so that American Indians and Alaska Natives will have equitable access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines as soon as they become available.”

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - PDF](#), along with IHS, states, and tribes, are coordinating the distribution of a vaccine for federal sites, tribal health programs, and UIOs. CDC has developed standard data requirements that all health care facilities must meet for COVID-19 vaccine administration, inventory, and monitoring.

“At the Indian Health Service, we are planning and preparing for COVID-19 vaccine distribution, allocation, and implementation,” said IHS Director Rear Adm. Michael D. Weahkee. “The success of a COVID-19 vaccine program for tribes and urban Indian communities depends on the strong partnership between the federal government, tribes, and urban leaders. There are system wide planning efforts in place to make sure we’re ready to implement vaccination activities as soon as a Food and Drug Administration authorized or approved vaccine is available.”

The IHS recently released the [IHS COVID-19 Pandemic Vaccine Plan November 2020 - PDF](#), which details how the IHS health care system will prepare for and operationalize a vaccine when it becomes available. It also provides important guidance for all tribal health programs and UIOs that choose to receive a COVID-19 vaccine coordinated through IHS as well as guidance for IHS federal sites.

To better understand the needs of American Indian and Alaska Native communities prior to publication of the IHS COVID-19 Pandemic Vaccine Plan, the Department of Health and Human Services initiated tribal consultation in September to seek input from tribal leaders on COVID-19 vaccination planning for Indian Country. The IHS also initiated [tribal consultation - PDF](#) and [urban confer - PDF](#) in October to seek input from tribal and urban leaders on the plan.

The IHS developed the plan based on the CDC's [COVID-19 Vaccination Interim Playbook for Jurisdiction Operations - PDF](#), while recognizing the sovereign authority of tribal nations to provide for the welfare of their people.

The list of IHS, tribal health program, and urban Indian organization facilities that will receive the COVID-19 vaccine from the IHS, broken down by IHS Area, is available on the [IHS coronavirus website - PDF](#).

About the Indian Health Service: The IHS, an agency in the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), provides a comprehensive health service delivery system for approximately 2.6 million American Indians and Alaska Natives who belong to [574 federally recognized tribes](#) in 37 states. Follow the agency via social media on [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

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