ROCKY MOUNTAIN TRIBAL EPIDEMIOLOGY CENTER (RMTEC) AND THE COVID-19 RESPONSE
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PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- RMTEC Background
- RMTEC Service
- Data management – COVID-19
  - Role of RMTEC
  - Successes
  - Failures
  - Opportunities
Tribes served by the RMTLC

Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council

www.rmtlc.org
TRIBAL EPIDEMIOLOGY CENTERS

- Established via Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) to elevate the health status of Tribal and urban Indian communities
- Four TECs were established in 1996, now 12 TECs exist nationwide
- TECs function independently, but also as part of a national group
- Core Funding is provided through a cooperative agreement with Indian Health Service Division of Epidemiology and Disease Prevention
- [https://tribalepicenters.org/](https://tribalepicenters.org/)
TRIBAL PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITIES

- 2010 Affordable Care Act permanently reauthorized the IHCIA - https://www.cdc.gov/phlp/docs/tec-issuedbrief.pdf

- TECs were given “Public Health Authority” status

- The U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) was directed to give TECs access to HHS data systems and protected health information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention directed to provide TECs technical assistance

- Each IHS Area must have TEC access
SEVEN ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF A TEC

1. Collect data (data agreements, publicly available sources)
2. Evaluate data and programs (data analysis, assessments, evaluation, indigenous evaluation methods)
3. Identify health priorities with Tribes
4. Make recommendations for health service needs (using public health methods)
5. Make recommendations for Improving health care delivery systems
6. Provide epidemiologic technical assistance to tribes and Tribal organizations
7. Provide Disease Surveillance to Tribes
RMTEC MISSION

To empower American Indian Nations and Urban Indian Health Centers by building community-driven public health and epidemiological capacity through outreach and creative partnerships.

...Empowering tribes with reliable data for public health planning and program development.
TRIBES WE SERVE

Montana – Wyoming
- Blackfeet Reservation
- Crow Reservation
- Fort Belknap Reservation
- Flathead Reservation
- Fort Peck Reservation
- Rocky Boy Reservation
- Wind River Reservation (Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho)
- Little Shell Tribe
Epi Center

Public Health Promotion
✓ Community Health Profile
✓ Surveillance

Recommendations for Interventions

Evaluation

Technical Assistance
RMTEC’s COVID-19 Response
Weekly Report is created using publicly available data from State, IHS and CDC websites.

The data is then localized for the RMTEC service center.

Testing, Mortality, and Vaccine data are available; however, it lacks race data.
New monthly covid-19 Cases for Billings Area - IHS

Source: IHS
Publicly Available data
Dashboard

- COVID-19 cases and vaccine distribution for Billings Area

https://www.rmtlc.org/tribal-epidemiology-centers/tec-dashboards/
Tribal Specific Reports

- Bi-weekly update – Tribe specific (data source: CDC case investigation)
- Reporting time is longer than the latency period of COVID-19
LIMITATIONS TO DATA

- Publicly available data often lacks race.
- Biweekly report lacks negative Covid-19 test preventing percent positivity rate.
COVID-19 Resources

Supplied Tribes with necessary PPE through coordination with the CDC Foundation
COVID-19 Education

RMTEC created flyers designed for Tribal communities
# Diabetes and COVID-19

"In some American Indian and Alaska Native communities, more than half of adults aged 18 and older have diagnosed diabetes, with prevalence rates reaching as high as 60%.

## Types
- Type 1: Autoimmune
- Type 2: Acquired
- Gestational: Pregnancy related

## Treatment
- Lifestyle Modification
  - (Diet + Exercise)
  - Insulin (Injections)
- Oral Medications that helps release insulin

## Symptoms
- Increased thirst
- Increased urination
- Fatigue
- Blurred vision
- Numbness/tingling in hands/feet
- Sores that take long to heal
- Unexplained weight loss

## Risk Factors
- Medications
- Unhealthy Lifestyle Habits
- Pancreatic Disorders
- Autoimmune Disorders
- Obesity
- Family History
- Age (>45)
- Ethnicity

## COVID-19 and Diabetes
- Based on the current information, having Type 1 or Gestational diabetes may increase your risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
- Examples of severe illnesses: Pneumonia, organ failure, breathing difficulties and others.

## What to Do
- *Monitor blood glucose levels*
- *Exercise regularly*
- *Eat healthy and nutritious foods*
- *Have a good night's sleep*
- *Decrease stress levels as much as possible*

*Follow COVID-19 protocols*

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Created by: Divya Narsala
Covid-19 Vaccination Strategy

- Survey analysis of the Covid-19 Hesitancy
- Targeted messaging
COVID-19 Challenges

- RMTEC’s first major epidemic/pandemic since establishment of Public Health Authority
- Typical reports are generated from the Electronic Data Market (EDM) from the Indian Health Service
- EDM is updated annually
- Data is governed by data sharing agreements with Tribal Public Health Departments
RMTEC Continued Work with COVID-19’s Indirect Effects on Tribal Public Health
RMTEC Successes

- Chronic Disease
- Public Health Training
Chronic Disease

- COVID-19 long term indirect effect
- EDM data establishes a clear picture of the chronic disease outlook
- 5-year tribal specific chronic disease reports analyzes the impact of COVID-19 on chronic disease encounter data.
Public Health Training

- Monthly Lecture Series
- Skills Trainings
- Ex. ARCGIS and Excel
RMTEC goals post COVID-19
Epidemiology infrastructure in America

- Majority of Tribal Health Departments do not have an epidemiologist.

- RMTEC offers free Epi 101, Biostatistics 101, and Public Health 101 lectures
The Next Pandemic

- HIPAA limits the data sharing from tribal partners to public health authorities
- Real-time data