



MESCALERO *Apache* **TRIBE**

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Dear Tribal Members:

I write to update you on the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. You probably know from watching the news that a surge in cases was predicted to occur this fall. Over the last few days, that prediction has proven true across the world, the country, and the State of New Mexico. Despite our best efforts, I am sad to say that we are experiencing a surge of cases on the Reservation as well. Since October 9th, the Tribe has identified over 47 new positive cases. In addition to the positive cases, many more individuals have been instructed to self-isolate because they have had direct contact with a COVID-19 positive individual. Because Indian Health Services ("IHS") continues to test and perform contact tracing, the number of positive cases may have risen since this letter was mailed to you.

The good news is that the Tribe has been preparing for this surge for several months. Here are some of the actions we have taken: we worked closely with IHS and the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) to stock up on test kits and other medical supplies, created a food bank for quarantined/self-isolated individuals and a personal protective equipment (PPE) cache for our essential employees and the community, established an isolation site for COVID-19 positive individuals, and implemented sanitizing protocols for Tribal governmental offices and enterprises. I think it is safe to say that we are more prepared to respond to this surge than many other communities. In addition, because this is not our first surge on the Reservation, we are prepared to implement restrictions that protect the community but also allow for the Tribe to continue to operate and provide services as much as possible. I enclosed a copy of Executive Order 20-12 with this letter. This new Executive Order protects you while also recognizing that the pandemic is predicted to continue for many months to come and that we cannot afford to shut down completely every time there is a surge in cases.

But the Tribal government itself cannot keep you safe without your help. We need you to do your part. Wash your hands frequently. Use hand sanitizer. Wear a facemask. Stay at home as much as possible. Social distance. Do not leave the State of New Mexico and stay away from hot zones within the State. Follow IHS's directions: if they tell you to quarantine, then please quarantine. If you do not comply with these recommendations, then the Tribe may

have to implement stricter rules. That said, I saw this community work together earlier this year to stop the spread of the virus before – I have no doubt that we can do it again.

I also wanted to share that I know many of you are concerned about possible exposure to the virus and you want to be tested as soon as possible. This is understandable. But please remember that IHS cannot test everyone. There will be a test kit shortage across the world in the coming months. So, we must focus testing on individuals that are exhibiting symptoms or identified by IHS as being a direct contact of someone who has tested positive. Again, IHS will determine if you are a direct contact; they will ask you CDC-developed screening questions to make this assessment. Also, please remember that the incubation period for the virus is from five (5) to seven (7) days. This means that if, for example, you were exposed to a positive individual on a Monday, then the earliest you should test is on the following Saturday. Otherwise, you could get a false negative result. As a result, it is important to self-isolate if you are a direct contact – even if you are not exhibiting symptoms or test negative. We know of several individuals that tested too soon only to test positive later. I have enclosed information from IHS on testing and the incubation period.

I hope that this letter was informative. The Tribe will keep you updated as the situation progresses. Stay safe!

Sincerely,



Gabe Aguilar
President