



MESCALERO *Apache* TRIBE

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December 15, 2020

Dear Tribal Members:

I write to provide an update on the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The past two months have been especially difficult on the Tribe. Case numbers spiked in late October and stayed high throughout November and early December. Sadly, we have lost 17 community members since the pandemic began; most of these deaths occurred in the last couple of weeks. Since the end of last week, case numbers have dropped from 10+ new cases a day to only one or two per day. We hope that this trend will continue.

Not only are we seeing less cases but also the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized emergency use of the vaccine. While news of the vaccine is encouraging, many of you have reached out with concerns as to the safety of the vaccine. Rest assured that the FDA's approval came after rigorous testing and trials. Also, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the vaccine, like the flu and other vaccines, has side effects. But the CDC also says that these side effects are mild compared to the symptoms that can arise from COVID-19 itself. Still, each person will have to decide for themselves whether they want to take the vaccine or not. As you make this decision, you should consult your doctor and only consider information provided by trained medical professionals and experts.

Indian Health Services (IHS) informed the Tribe that it is expecting to receive vaccine doses this week or next week through Phase 1 of the federal government's Operation Warp Speed vaccine distribution plan. Due to limited supply, health care workers and first responders will receive the vaccine first. Currently, IHS does not know how many doses are coming to Mescalero. Most other states and tribes are waiting to find out how much they will receive as well. Please remember that this is only Phase 1; as more vaccines are created and distributed, more people will be able to receive the vaccine. While we wait for the vaccine to be distributed widely, we must continue to observe COVID-19 safety precautions. There have been positive developments, but this pandemic is not over.

In conclusion, I want to ask the Tribal community to come together in prayer. I ask that you pray for the people who lost loved ones and I ask that you pray for the community as whole. We are a small community; and each death is felt deeply. While this will be a tough Christmas because we are mourning our lost community members and must socially distance from our loved ones, I know we can come together in prayer to get through this. God bless you and your families.

Sincerely,

Gabe Aguilar
President