



# National Indian Health Board NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

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## COVID-19 and Native Americans With Diabetes

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) have a greater chance of having diabetes than any other group of people in the United States. While diabetes doesn't put you at higher risk for getting COVID-19, AI/ANs with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes are more likely to get **severely ill** from COVID-19.

Severe Illness means that a person with COVID-19 may need:

- Hospitalization
- Intensive care
- A ventilator to help them breathe
- Or they may even die



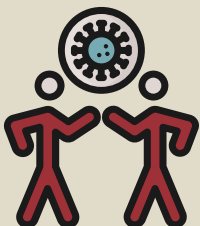
Because of the risk for severe illness from COVID-19 and the increased risk of having diabetes, it is important for AI/ANs to understand how to lower their risk for COVID-19 while managing diabetes.

## How Can I Lower My Risk?

### Follow Physical Distancing Guidelines

Many Tribes and states have implemented physical distancing guidelines, asking people to avoid public situations where the virus may spread. The goal of physical distancing is to avoid contact with someone who may be sick with COVID-19. If you have diabetes, 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 diabetes and other higher-risk health conditions.
- If you have to go out in public, put distance between yourself and other people to reduce your risk.



## Get the COVID-19 Vaccine



If you haven't already received the COVID-19 vaccine, contact your Tribal healthcare facility to find out how to get the vaccine. The vaccine is safe and effective for preventing COVID-19, especially for those at higher risk for severe illness, such as Native Americans with diabetes.

It is important for Tribal members to understand:

- COVID-19 vaccines reduce the risk of people spreading the virus that causes COVID-19.
- It is normal to experience side effects such as headache, tiredness, and muscle pain after getting the vaccine, but they should go away after a few days.

## Manage Your Diabetes



Well managed diabetes decreases your risk of severe COVID-19 infection. Continue to eat healthy, traditional foods and engage in physical activity. While your recreation center may be closed, it is generally ok to go outside for walks or other physical activities as long as you are staying at least 6 feet away from other people. Talk to your doctor or local diabetes prevention program about how you can continue to manage your diabetes while following your Tribe's guidelines for physical distancing.

## Work With Your Tribal Healthcare Provider



If you are having symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath, call your healthcare provider. When you call, if possible, have the following information available:

- Your glucose reading
- Your ketone reading
- Keep track of what you drink (by number of bottles or cups) so you can report

When you talk to your healthcare provider, it is important to be clear about the symptoms you are experiencing and ask questions about how to best manage your diabetes.



### Seek medical help immediately if you have:

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

# The Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) and COVID-19

The Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI), established by Congress in 1997 to combat the growing epidemic of diabetes in AI/ANs, has become the nation's most effective federal initiative to combat diabetes.

Since the program began, AI/AN people have seen drastic improvements in diabetes risk, including reduced A1c levels and the largest reduction in rates of kidney disease for any race or ethnicity. Additionally, diabetes rates have not risen in AI/AN communities in approximately a decade. Serving approximately 780,000 people in 301 Tribal, Urban, and Indian Health Service programs each year, SDPI has been vital to Native communities.

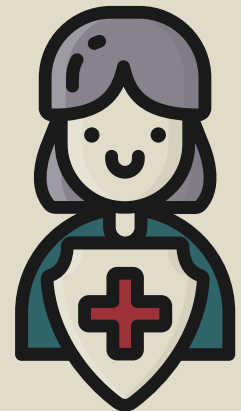


**Now, more than ever, SDPI is key for preventing disease and death in the AI/AN population**

## **Reach out to your SDPI Program for Assistance**

Each SDPI program is unique to your Tribe, Urban organization, or IHS clinic. Reach out to your diabetes program to see how they can support you in managing your diabetes and reducing your risk of COVID-19.

If you need assistance, or are unsure who to contact, call your Tribe's health center, local IHS clinic, or reach out to your IHS Area Diabetes Consultant (ADC). The list and contact information for your ADC can be found at <https://www.ihs.gov/diabetes/about-us/area-diabetesconsultants-adc/>



For more information, or to learn more about frequently asked questions, visit the [CDC website](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html).  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>



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**For more information, visit NIHB's National Tribal COVID-19 Response page at [www.nihb.org](http://www.nihb.org)**