



National Indian Health Board NATIONAL TRIBAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

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Obesity and COVID-19 for Native Americans

- Obesity disproportionately affects American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN), and AI/AN adults are 50% more likely to have obesity compared to the general population.
- Approximately half of all AI/AN adults are diagnosed with obesity.
- Obesity may triple the risk for hospitalization due to COVID-19.
 - Between the beginning of the pandemic and November 18, 2020, more than 900,000 adults have been hospitalized for COVID-19 in the United States. It is estimated that about 30.2% of these hospitalizations were attributed to obesity¹.
- Chronic diseases such as obesity, heart disease, and diabetes can lead to worse COVID-19 outcomes.
- It is important for Native Americans affected by obesity to understand their risk for COVID-19.

How Can I Lower My Risk of Getting COVID-19?

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 obesity, 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 high-risk health conditions.
- If you have to go out in public put distance between yourself and other people to reduce your risk. Wear a mask in public places to protect yourself and others.
- Wash your hands frequently, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water is not available.



Get the COVID-19 Vaccine

If you haven't already gotten 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, such as Native Americans affected by obesity. Find a vaccine near you at vaccines.gov.

It is important for Tribal members to understand:

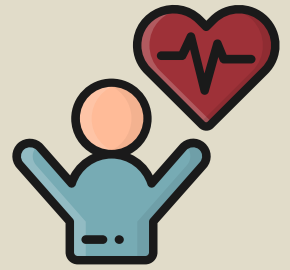
- COVID-19 vaccines reduce the risk of people spreading the virus that causes COVID-19.
- It is normal to experience side effects such as headache, tiredness, and muscle pain after getting the vaccine, but they should go away after a few days.

Work With Your Tribal Healthcare Provider

If you are having symptoms such as a fever, cough, or shortness of breath, call your healthcare provider!

Seek medical help immediately if you have:

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



Healthy Habits During COVID-19

If you have been working on creating healthy habits, or have been trying to lose weight, it may be hard to continue these efforts during COVID-19. Many Tribes have closed their services, including gyms and nutrition programs, to protect citizens from COVID-19 exposure.

Talk to your healthcare provider, registered dietitian, or your Tribal health department to ask about resources available to you. Additionally, see [NIHB's material](#) on Food Security and Nutrition and Gym Infection Control to identify additional steps you can take to eat healthy and exercise.



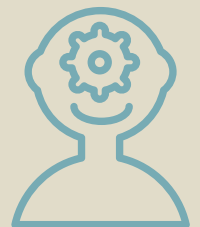
Remember that it is ok if your priorities change and you can't maintain all your healthy behaviors. Your other health needs, such as taking care of your family, protecting yourself from COVID-19, and managing your mental health may need to come first.

Mental Health

Being isolated or afraid of COVID-19 can be difficult for many people, and it is normal to feel worried, sad, lonely, or confused.

It is important to stay in contact with your loved ones through phone or email, and to do activities you enjoy or find relaxing.

If you are struggling with managing your feelings, talk to your healthcare provider to get support from a professional. You can also call the Disaster Distress Helpline for support at 1-800-985-5990.



For more information, or to learn more about frequently asked questions, visit the [CDC website](#).

<https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/obesity-and-covid-19.html>

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2021. *Obesity, Race/Ethnicity, and COVID-19*. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/obesity-and-covid-19.html>



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For more information, visit NIHB's National Tribal COVID-19 Response page at www.nihb.org