

USET Tribal Epidemiology Center

Recommendations for Tribal Consideration

USET TEC COVID-19 Guidance 2020-002: Social Distancing



Background

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have encouraged social distancing a critical strategy in preventing COVID-19. The USET Tribal Epidemiology Center (TEC) recognizes that social distancing is especially important in Indian country where there are many risk factors that can increase the spread and severity of COVID-19 such as multigenerational households, high prevalence of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, lung disease, and other chronic conditions. Elders are especially vulnerable to severe COVID-19 complications, including death. Elders hold a sacred place as cultural knowledge and language keepers within native communities; thus, it is imperative that measures are taken to prevent the rapid spread of COVID-19. The USET TEC strongly encourages each Tribal Nation to adapt their own social distancing policy/order to help protect the most susceptible of Tribal citizens. Tribal Nations that have social distancing policies/orders should consider frequently reviewing them to reflect local conditions and needs. Please contact the USET TEC at usetepi@usetinc.org for assistance in developing social distancing measures.

Social Distancing Definition

The CDC defines social distancing as maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet (2 meters) from others in public (grocery stores, waiting rooms, meetings, etc.) and staying out of crowded places as much as possible. The USET TEC is unaware of any guidance recommending routine social distancing among household members at this time.

Examples of Social Distancing Measures for Tribal Nation Consideration

- Close all non-essential businesses.
- For businesses that must stay open, consider telework options.
- Restrict access to assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and other elder programs.
- Limit gatherings of more than 10 people (or even fewer).
- Consider alternative methods for conducting critical Tribal business: online meeting platforms, livestream, etc.
- Encourage/order local essential businesses, such as grocery stores, to offer shopping hours only to elders and other vulnerable people to prevent larger crowds that may spread COVID-19.
- Coordinate, as appropriate, with state/local guidance. Tribal Nations may feel different orders are needed based on their local circumstances.