

Good news ahead, but challenges remain as vaccines start to reach more areas

From the North Portland Area Indian Health Board

There is good news about COVID-19 vaccines, but we need to be vigilant for a while longer.

You have probably seen or heard the good news about the results of the COVID-19 vaccine trials. Two vaccines have reported almost 95% effectiveness in preventing infection with COVID-19. And more vaccines are on the way.

Having been approved by the Food and Drug Administration, the first of these vaccines is already being distributed and Tribes have started to receive their shipments. Health care workers and people in long-term care facilities are expected to receive the first doses. In the next 6-9 months, the rest of the U.S. population should be able to be vaccinated.

Covid-19 continues to surge

With this great news about the vaccine, it is tempting to let our guard down about COVID-19. But we must stay resolved and continue to take steps to prevent its spread. The virus is surging all across the U.S. Hospitals are becoming over-crowded. Tribal communities, where medical care and resources can be limited, are some of the hardest hit.

Even being vaccinated does not mean we can stop being cautious. First, it takes several weeks for vaccines to be protective. Second, while it is known that the vaccines are effective at preventing serious

COVID-19 disease, it is not yet known if they prevent asymptomatic infection that could be transmitted to others. Until the majority of the population is vaccinated, it is essential to wear a mask around people you don't live with.

Our collective commitment to fighting COVID-19 is more important now than ever before.

Remaining vigilant

The next 6-9 months are critical

There is light at the end of the tunnel, but even with vaccines coming, remaining vigilant while we wait for them to be widely distributed is essential. This will help protect thousands of people. Together, we can protect our Tribes, communities and families.

In the last few weeks, the most frequently reported places of exposure to COVID-19 are households, community or social activities, and workplaces. It is difficult to think that people you work and interact with might be infectious, but treating everyone you encounter outside your household as if they might have COVID-19 is the safest thing to do.

Everyday actions

Below are the four most important actions you can continue to take to stay safe. Together they provide a layered approach to limiting risk to yourself and others, each action building on the next to add more protection.

1. Wear masks. Non-ventilated, multi-layer cloth masks not only help prevent you from exhaling infectious particles but from inhaling them, too. Wear masks whenever you are around people you don't live with, inside or outside.
2. Stay at least six feet apart. When we breathe, talk, cough or sing, we exhale microscopic droplets. Larger droplets fall out of the air at about six feet, but smaller droplets, sometimes called aerosols, can travel past six feet and remain in the air for several hours.
3. Avoid large indoor gatherings. These types of gatherings are a prime place to spread COVID-19. Inside it is difficult to stay six feet apart, poor indoor air circulation can cause a concentration of aerosol particles and surfaces have more opportunity to become contaminated because of the concentration of people.
4. Wash your hands. New studies have shown that the coronavirus can remain infectious on human skin for up to nine hours. Washing your hands frequently can help prevent spread.

box or purse; discuss safe gatherings with family and friends before events; and take a moment before gatherings to consider location, time and distance.

- Location. Is the activity indoors or outdoors? Outdoor is better than indoor. COVID-19 stays in the air longer when indoors and can be spread by ventilation systems. Crowded indoor locations are especially high-risk.
- Time. How long will you be doing the activity? Shorter activities are safer. Being in "close contact," or within six feet of an infected individual for 15 minutes over 24 hours, increases your risk of becoming infected
- Distance. Can you stay at least six feet apart from others? Most germs cannot travel more than six feet from person-to-person in the air.
- Thinking and planning for location, time and distance in your activities will help you and others stay safe, but it does not replace wearing a mask or staying home altogether!

Planning ahead

As you go about your day or life, plan ahead to be safe. Have extra face coverings and hand sanitizer in your backpack, glove

With vaccines now in sight, the light is on at the end of the tunnel. We still must stay cautious though, until our communities can be protected by it.



Indian Health Service
National Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee
Pharmacovigilance Drug Safety Alert



V-Safe After Vaccination Health Checker



V-safe is a smartphone-based tool developed by the CDC that uses text messaging and web surveys to conduct electronic health check-ins with participants who have received a COVID-19 vaccine.

Electronic health check-ins will take place:

- daily for first week post-vaccination
- weekly thereafter until 6 weeks post-vaccination
- additional checks at 3-, 6-, and 12-months post-vaccination

Electronic health check-ins will:

- Provide an opportunity for participants to report any side effects or health problems after COVID-19 vaccination.
 - If reports result in significant health impact, the CDC will follow-up by phone and create a VAERS report if appropriate.
- Capture information on pregnancy status and enable follow-up on pregnant women.
- Remind participants when it is time to get their second dose of COVID-19 vaccine if needed.

To register, visit: [CDC v-safe website](https://www.cdc.gov/v-safe/)

The CDC asks that healthcare providers:

- Give a one-page enrollment sheet to patients at the time of vaccination.
- Counsel patients on the importance of enrolling in v-safe.

Participation in v-safe is voluntary and patients can opt out at any time. Consider placing v-safe posters and materials in clinic rooms and locations where the COVID vaccine may be administered.

Learn more information about using the [v-safe after vaccine health checker](https://www.cdc.gov/v-safe/).

To help track safety issues with vaccinations, please report adverse vaccine events involving to the VAERS program as recommended in the [Indian Health Manual](https://www.cdc.gov/vaers/). Instructions for reporting can be found online at the [NPTC Pharmacovigilance website](https://www.cdc.gov/vaers/).

December 14, 2020

Rain and Face Coverings

Letting your face covering get wet may decrease its effectiveness and make it difficult to breathe.

Keep your mask dry by wearing a rain jacket with a hood, carrying an umbrella, or having another means to shield your face covering from the rain. You may also want to carry a spare, just in case.



For more information visit
healthoregon.org/coronavirus or call 211

Oregon Health Authority