

# SPECIAL EDITION NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

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# THE GRIN



SPECIAL EDITION

GILA RIVER INDIAN NEWS || [www.GRICNEWS.org](http://www.GRICNEWS.org)

MARCH 23, 2020

## CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

### Letter to the Gila River Indian Community from Governor Stephen Roe Lewis

**Gov. Stephen Roe Lewis**  
Gila River Indian Community

I know the past week has been a very stressful week for the Country and in the Community. The coronavirus (COVID-19) has now spread across the country, leading the President to issue a Declaration of Emergency, the World Health Organization to officially list the virus as a pandemic and the Secretary of Health and Human Services to declare a Public Health Emergency.

To date there are NO confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Community. But in Arizona, as of Sunday morning, there are now 152 cases reported – and a second death just reported.

Although there are no confirmed cases in the Community, the Executive and Community Council are meeting regularly to make decisions to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of the Community's residents. That is why I issued an Emergency Declaration last Friday that restricts gatherings of large numbers of people – first 50 and then revised to 10 to meet the federal guidelines. We also are asking Elders to stay home and avoid gatherings to the extent possible as the virus is affecting Elders and those with underlying conditions more seriously than others.

The Executive and the Community Council have had regular briefings by the COVID-19 Taskforce that is made up of Gila River Health Care and the Office of Emergency Management. We have put a plan in place to emphasize prevention of the virus, while also planning in the unfortunate event a confirmed case is identified in the Community.

Earlier this week, the Executive and Community Council made the difficult decision to close our gaming facilities. This was a very difficult decision because our Community businesses provide funding for a broad range of our governmental programs. But, we decided to close for two weeks to allow time to assess the situation in Arizona and most of all – to make sure our employees are not inadvertently exposed to a patron who may be carrying the virus. We will continuously reassess the situation and make decisions based on the impacts of the virus in Arizona and on our Community.

We are aggressively advocating for resources at the state and federal level to assist the Community during this time with our top goals being providing meals and services to our Elders and any Community members with special needs, and the continuation

*We know that as O'otham and Pee Posh people our ancestors have left us a legacy of rising up and pulling together during difficulties and of taking care of each other.*

*- Gov. Stephen Roe Lewis*

of governmental services and programs to Community members.

This is an uncertain time. The situation went from one that was being monitored overseas to one that has us being asked to remain separated so we don't catch or pass the virus to others we come in contact with. The remedies for spread of the virus are foreign to us as Native people – we are told not to gather, to ask our Elders to stay home and not participate in group activities, to not hug and shake hands and not to go directly to the hospital if we feel sick. It feels contrary to how we normally interact with each other.

But we care about each other so we comply with the guidelines in the hope that our actions will prevent a serious outbreak in the Community. Our proximity to a metropolitan area makes it hard to contain all contact off Reservation but we know that taking these actions will ultimately mean we are



COVID-19 Task force convenes during a series meetings at the Viola L. Johnson Administration Building on March 13. Gila River Health Care

protecting each other.

We don't know how long the outbreak threat will last, but we do know some things for certain. We know that the decisions we are making are for the health and safety of the Community. We know that this outbreak is unlike anything we have seen in the past decades, but we also know that our Community has weathered challenges before. We know that as O'otham and Pee Posh people our ancestors have left us a legacy of rising up and pulling together during difficulties and of taking care of each other. We know this crisis will pass eventually and we know we will be a stronger Com-

munity on the other side. We will have gratitude for our gatherings and our colleagues and our elder events and for our schools.

For now, please look out for each other and follow the guidance as much as possible. I will continue to update you via video messages, social media, Executive statements, and other means.

Here are several resources you can use during this time:

- COVID-19 Hotline: 520-550-6079

- Coronavirus Website: [GRHC.org/coronavirus](http://GRHC.org/coronavirus)

Prayers for the health and safety of all of our people.

### Students and families are adjusting as the coronavirus outbreak worsens

**Kyle Knox**  
Gila River Indian News

As the disruption of day-to-day activities and routines from COVID-19 occur throughout the country, school closures have rippled across the Gila River Indian Community affecting students, educators and families.

The Tribal Education Department (TED) is addressing this public health issue with a proactive approach of keeping students home while finding solutions to provide other services. TED is "committed to ensuring that Community Members receive educational support and resources during the recent closures and changes to educational facilities

in the state of Arizona."

TED is supporting schools by linking school resources from within and outside the Community to students and families.

As of this week, like many around the state, most K-12 schools have extended their Spring Breaks to March 27 as a precautionary measure against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community schools during this time will be performing deep cleanings within their facilities, as recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). And as of now, these closures are based on the actions recommended by the Arizona Governor Doug Ducey on March 15.

Additional actions include

TED Student Advisors who are, "working to gather online resources for their students; this includes online tutoring, and free support." K-12 staff is also assisting off-reservation schools to make sure students have instructional materials needed to complete any additional work.

Student Advisors will be continuing to check in with their students and families, as well as helping distribute meals as needed. Many schools are currently working on plans to distribute food and meals at various locations within the Community for students, and in some cases, their families.

TED advises all Community members to visit your student's

school website for up-to-date information. And they also encourage everyone to contact Student Advisors who are available by phone and email from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Additional actions are developing to service current college students. Upon returning from spring break, most universities and colleges have closed their classrooms and switched to an online format. And many have stated they will continue with the online format indefinitely.

Some colleges and universities are offering emergency aid to students in need of food and supplies. These services vary from campus to campus, and up to date information is found on

the school's webpage. TED advises students to make a habit of checking their student portals as schools continue sending updates as the semester progresses.

For vocational/trade school students, similar actions are being enforced where some schools are changing to online course work. Again, students should check with their campus and follow up with their GRIC Student Advisor for updates to scheduling and school closures.

TED is aware that some challenges with schools switching to the online format, and not all students may have access to the internet or a computer. Those who are experiencing difficulty acquiring the necessary resources should contact their GRIC Student Services Advisor as soon as possible.

Advisors will increase communication accordingly with students and sending emails and letters to the addresses on file regarding the scholarship program this week. Contact TED if your contact information has recently

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#### COVID-19

An outbreak of respiratory disease caused by a novel (new) coronavirus that was first detected in China and which has now been detected in more than 100 locations internationally, including the United States. The virus has been named "SARS-Cov-2" and the disease it causes has been named "coronavirus disease 2019" (abbreviated "COVID-19"). - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

**Continued on Page 2**



## FROM THE FRONT PAGE

changed.

And lastly, the TED Culture and Language Program will continue with culture and language instruction via various formats to the Community. With the help of the Culture Teachers from the schools and others interested in culture and language, revitalization lessons will be available soon.

TED wants to assure the Community that they will continue to assist students with questions and concerns. A spokesperson for TED said, "we will do our best to get our students the resources needed to help you complete the semester successfully. We wish you good health and

peace during this time."

Early Education Child Care Facilities are also closed through March 27 in the following locations: District 3 Sacaton Head Start and Early Head Start and Early Education Child Care; District 4 Santan Head Start and Early Head Start; District 5 Vah-ki Head Start and Early Head Start; and District 6 Komatke Head Start and Early Head Start.

To speak with a representative from each of these programs, you may contact the Tribal Education Department from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday at (520) 562-3662.

As families prepare for their students to remain out of school, the local Boys and Girls Clubs of the East Valley branches remain open and will provide activ-

ities during this time. GRIC clubs and clubs throughout the valley are changing their hours to service families without childcare. The new hours are from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. from their regular afternoon/evening hours.

In addition to the new hours, branches are pre-screening members before they attend the new Club hours while increasing their sanitation and cleaning efforts for members and surfaces in the Club.

Tamara Peters, Program Director for the Komatke Branch, said they are doing everything in their power to prevent the spread of germs within the facility. Upon entering, visitors must wash their hands and use hand sanitizer before entering any room in the Club. And within every room, there are hand sanitizers for all to use.

"We understand that parents may not want their kids around others; the schools are closed for a reason, so we understand the need to keep them at home, but we are open," said Peters.

For those interested, Boys and Girls Clubs is providing meals. Kid's Care is a program that provides lunches for members every day. Though Kid's Care doesn't offer breakfast, many club staff are purchasing breakfast meals for the members that are present.

For now, Boys and

Girls Clubs will continue to operate with the changes brought on by the outbreak while schools remain closed or if they are recommended to shutdown.

Their computer labs assist students that may have online instruction during school closures. And every room/space is utilized on rotation during this time to keep members in limited numbers as an extra precaution.

If you are interested in learning more, they advise you to contact your local branch to learn about the capacity limits, hours, and information on the safety of the facility.

### Affects on Community Members

Eliana Antone, 15-years-old, is a sophomore attending Skyline Gila River. Antone initially welcomed the recommendations to stay home, but soon realized that the time off will have consequences.

"Like any other teen, I was somewhat happy at first getting more time off, but I started thinking about it more and realized how much time is wasted due to this and how much work we would have to catch up on," Antone said.

Her Activities as a member of the Akimel O'odham/ Pee-Posh Youth Council have also been impacted. "I'm on the youth council, I thought I'd be able to focus on that, but they have also put a lot of

our stuff on hold," Antone said.

Although only a sophomore, Antone is wondering how this may affect her timeline to graduate. She has time to make up any work, but she said her older peers who are seniors are understandably worried about graduation.

Antone said she understands the safety measures needed and encourages others to follow recommendations.

While high school students are dealing with the school closures, college students have also been adjusting to the coronavirus outbreak. Marlena Whitehair, District 3, is a freshman at Arizona State University, where she is majoring in Justice Studies and a minor in American Indian Studies. Whitehair also shared some insights into her experience to date.

"When I first learned about the school going on two weeks of online courses, it was very concerning and scary with how abrupt it happened," said Whitehair. ASU students were informed about the switch to online courses during their spring break, March 9-13. But as of Monday, March 16, students were told that all classes would be online for the remainder of the spring semester.

"I was on spring break already, and when I learned of ASU closing, I just decided to leave all my be-

longings in the dorm." Like her peers, she had planned for the break but only took some necessities. She only took home her laptop and a few textbooks.

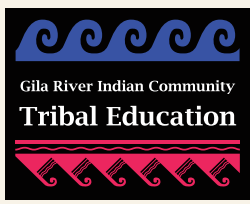
Unfortunately, that's not the case for some of Whitehair's peers as many left campus and returned home with only the bare essentials for spring break. They left textbooks, school supplies, or laptops behind and don't want to risk returning to campus.

"We just have to adjust, but online classes are more difficult because some courses are hard to teach online, especially for my ASL class [American Sign Language]," said Whitehair.

While challenging, she acknowledges that students and staff alike are adapting with the change.

Despite lectures and assignments delivered and submitted online with minimal in-person communication, Whitehair and her peers are diligently supporting one another using various online and phone applications.

Thankfully with online courses means Whitehair can still occupy her time while at home and continue with her education. But even for Whitehair, she recognizes that "it's a scary time because something like this has never happened before, but all we can do is adjust and keep moving forward."



**School/Scholarship information:**  
**520-562-3316**



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS**  
**OF THE EAST VALLEY**  
**Sacaton branch (520) 562-3890**  
**Komatke branch (520) 550-1113**

# Community Services and Public Safety addressing needs

**Emma Hughes**  
Gila River Indian News

The Community Services Department has begun preventative measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by cancelling senior recreational activities, meals are still being served, fitness rooms, recreation activities and computer labs are closed until further notice. The districts are still open and providing services.

The Elderly Services Program has issued a notice to the elder community on Monday, March 16, that transportation requests are suspended until further notice. Elders are strongly encouraged to stay home as they are the most vulnerable. Elderly Services Liaisons will assist elders as needed. Critical requests for travel will be considered on a case-by-case basis. For more information, the number to the Elderly Services is (520) 562-5232 or the Elderly Coordinator, Linda Miles can be reached at (520) 610-4098.

Gila River Fire Department is involved and working with Community leaders, the Public Safety Divisions and other Com-

munity Departments to combat COVID-19 (coronavirus). Currently they are taking extra precautions and equipping firefighters with additional protective equipment due to the significant risk COVID-19 poses to the Community and the most vulnerable members.

Internally, GRFD is reviewing their current practices, procedures, and training for infection control and disease prevention. This will also include procedures should the staff become exposed or infected with COVID-19. They have reduced their non-essential interaction with the public by temporarily suspending station tours, fueling fire trucks whenever possible at the fire stations, exercising at the stations instead of service centers, and observing social distancing of 6-feet, recommended by the CDC.

Alan Sinclair FMO-BIA, and type 1 Incident Commander for the Southwest Area Incident Management Team #1 (one of 15 National IMT's) has mentored many employees over the years, with some obtaining national qualification. It has enhanced the

ability to support the Community's response to this incident.

Additionally, all public safety is participating as a key public safety partner with the Gila River Indian Community Incident Management Team, helping to coordinate and assist with organizing the Community's response to the pandemic. Several public safety employees participate regularly on national incident management teams, responding to devastating wildfires and other disasters.

Gila River Police Department (GRPD) has shared that they will be asking a few short additional questions when interacting with the public, in relation to calls for EMS & Fire, in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Some of those questions might include weather or not someone has traveled recently to a known infected area or if there has been any contact with someone who has flu like symptoms. GRPD is asking everyone to please be patient with public safety dispatchers and first responders as these additional steps are

to ensure further safety. Non-priority calls such as property crimes that are not taking place at the time will be handled via telephone by an officer.

Currently no known crimes within the Community are linked to COVID-19. Despite national reports of theft of daily toiletries, water, medicines or other items, there have not been any calls pertaining to burglarized GRIC homes or businesses. GRPD does, however, encourage social media users to limit the amount of information shared regarding what supplies they do or do not have at home. High visibility patrols will be placed in concentrated housing areas to help maintain order and ensure safety to the public. Sworn personnel will be going to elderly complexes to check on elders in every district.

GRPD continues to monitor this fluid and changing environment and will make the necessary adjustments to continue ensuring the safety and health of their officers, staff, and the Community. GRPD's mobile app is available for download and contains

## DISTRICT SERVICE CENTERS

- **District 1 Service Center**  
15747 North Shegoi Road, Coolidge, AZ 85128  
Phone: (520) 215-2110
- **District 2 Service Center**  
8070 W. Park St., Sacaton, AZ 85147  
Phone: (520) 562-3450
- **District 3 Service Center**  
15747 North Shegoi Road, Coolidge, AZ 85128  
Phone: (520) 215-2110
- **District 4 Service Center**  
8070 W. Park St., Sacaton, AZ 85147  
Phone: (520) 562-3450
- **District 5 Service Center**  
8070 W. Park St., Sacaton, AZ 85147  
Phone: (520) 562-3450
- **District 6 Service Center**  
15747 North Shegoi Road, Coolidge, AZ 85128  
Phone: (520) 215-2110
- **District 4 Service Center**  
8070 W. Park St., Sacaton, AZ 85147  
Phone: (520) 562-3450

more information, such as a crime map, anonymous tips, and now more information on COVID-19 from GRPD and GRHC.

As mentioned everyone should wash their hands often with soap and water. Use a hand sanitizer, when soap and water are not available. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed

hands. Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Stay at home when you are sick. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw in the trash or cough into your sleeve. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces to reduce the spread of the coronavirus and contribute to a healthy Community.



# HEALTH ALERT

## NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

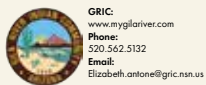


### IMPORTANT PATIENT NOTICE FROM EMS

**As most area hospitals are not allowing visitors to arrive with patients to the emergency departments, friends and family will not be allowed to ride in the ambulances.**

**The only exceptions to this is (1) guardian for a patient under 18 or (1) support caregiver for a patient in labor. Thank you for understanding as we are dedicated to providing the safest patient care to our patients during these times.**

**We encourage patients to use virtual visits via phone, FaceTime or video chats to keep in touch with their loved ones.**



**FOR GENERAL INFO ABOUT CORONAVIRUS, GO TO [GRHC.ORG/CORONAVIRUS](http://GRHC.ORG/CORONAVIRUS) OR CALL THE GRHC CORONAVIRUS HOTLINE AT (520) 550-6079**

# DEFINITIONS

### SOCIAL DISTANCING

Social distancing involves avoiding large gatherings. Keep a distance of six feet if possible.

### QUARANTINE

Quarantines are used to stop the spread of contagious diseases for those who don't have symptoms but were exposed to the virus.

### ISOLATION

Isolation is similar to quarantine, but for those who are already sick and have symptoms. If you're infected it keeps you away from healthy people to prevent the spread of the illness.

### PANDEMIC

An epidemic of disease, or other health condition, that occurs over a widespread area (multiple countries or continents) and usually affects a sizeable part of the population - U.S Department of Health and Human Services.

### NATIONAL EMERGENCY

A national emergency is a national crisis or a situation where circumstances threaten the country and call for an immediate response (usnews.com). The President of the United States has available certain powers that may be exercised in the event that the nation is threatened by crisis, exigency, or emergency circumstances (fas.org).

## Health care officials responding to crisis

**Christopher Lomahquahu**  
Gila River Indian News

As COVID-19 continues to be a concern across the nation and world, the Gila River Indian Community is taking aggressive measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In an effort to reduce the spread of infection, the Gila River Health Care is screening visitors and patients for symptoms of COVID-19.

As of this March 19, there were 45 reported cases in the state of Arizona and currently, there are no reported cases of COVID-19

in the Community. According to GRHC Dr. Anthony Santiago (Chief Medical Officer), 48 individuals were screened in the Community as of March 18), 8 of them GRHC employees, which were negative for COVID-19.

Despite these results, Santiago said the possibility of COVID-19 in the Community, "Is not a matter of if, but when," GRIC will have a positive case.

Dr. Santiago said GRHC can take specimens for COVID-19, which will be sent off for testing at an outside lab for results. To expedite the testing process, the GRHC is exploring the possibility acquiring analyzing equipment to test for COVID-19 that can provide results in a timely manner.

Gov. Stephen Roe Lewis said the capacity for the Community to test for COVID-19, expands GRIC's ability to treat its members.

"We can get results a lot

quicker," said Myron Schurz GRHC Board of Directors Chairman.

Schurz said they want to be prepared for what is to come, that includes the proper staffing, and equipment needed to treat patients.

Screening stations have been setup at several entrances at each of the GRHC campuses, including dialysis centers, where they will be checked-in by a staff member. GRHC also developed a list of symptoms associated with COVID-19 to screen, which are: a new cough, fever, sore throat and shortness of breath.

They recommend wearing a medical mask for individuals who are sick to prevent the spread of germs and recommend visitors to use hygienic practices when in and around exam rooms and areas where staff work.

An important part of the visitation restrictions requires one family member to be allowed into the Emergency Department, im-

patient and wound care/infusion department. This also applies to the east and west dialysis centers.

These practices are not just for patients and visitors. They are also recommended for GRHC staff who need to safeguard themselves against infection. This includes, procedures for employees to follow in the event they are experiencing symptoms associated with COVID-19.

The GRHC recommends individuals who are experiencing symptoms related to COVID-19 to contact their health care provider and notify the hospital or clinic, prior to coming in for treatment. If you are experiencing said symptoms, it is important to wear a face mask and avoid contact with others.

According to Santiago, diabetics, those suffering from cardiovascular disease, the elderly and those with some comorbid conditions have higher mortality rates for COVID-19.

## TRIBAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT

- Disease Surveillance
- Disease Surveillance Program (DSP) is actively investigating reported instances of communicable disease in the community.
- DSP compiles surveillance reports and works alongside GRHC, local counties and Arizona Department of Health Services to report confirmed cases.
- Prevention Education to community
- Each THD program is providing health alert flyers to community members while in the field.
- Community Health Education (CHE) Specialists
- Providing information on prevention techniques to several entities/partners.
- Posting health alert flyers throughout each district.
- Distributing copies to each district for residence and homebound programs.
- CHE's distribute information on a weekly basis
- Environmental Health Services (EHS) Specialist and Technicians
- Providing education on recommendations for cleaning and disinfecting; also providing sanitization buckets during education session.

## GILA RIVER HEALTH CARE IMPORTANT PATIENT INFORMATION

### CLOSED SERVICES:

- Dental (Emergent/Acute Care Only)
- Physical Therapy (Scheduled Appts. Only)
- Life Center Classes
- Vendors (Arts & Crafts)

### VISITATION SUSPENDED: No visitors at this time.

- The Caring House
- Residential Treatment Center

### RESTRICTED VISITATION: Restricted to one family member per visit

- East/West Dialysis Center: one family member per visit
- Hu Hu Kam Memorial Hospital: visitors are limited to one family member when in the Emergency Department and Inpatient/Wound Care/Infusion Department.

### PHARMACY PRESCRIPTIONS:

The Pharmacy department would like to remind patients of the following options for filling/refilling prescriptions:

- Patients are encouraged to call ahead for refills
- Use the Pharmacy drive thru when dropping off/picking up prescriptions
- Certain prescriptions are available via mail order

Q: What are the symptoms and complications that 2019 Novel Coronavirus can cause?

A: Current symptoms reported for patients with COVID-19 have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. Read about COVID-19 symptoms at the CDC website.

# Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has announced that the NOVEL CORONAVIRUS is Now (COVID-19)



**GRIC:**  
www.mygilariver.com  
**Phone:**  
520.562.5132  
**Email:**  
Elizabeth.antone@gric.nsn.us



**GRHC:**  
www.grhc.org/coronavirus  
**Phone:**  
520.550.6079



**OEM:**  
www.gricsafety.org  
**Phone:**  
520.610.8120  
**Email:**  
OEM2@gric.nsn.us

This interim guidance is based on what is currently known about the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the transmission of other viral respiratory infections. The CDC will update this interim guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available.

## To help control the spread of the coronavirus, the CDC recommends the following:



**WASH HANDS WITH  
WATER & OR USE  
HAND SANITIZER.**



**COVER YOUR NOSE AND  
MOUTH WHEN SNEEZING**



**WEAR A SURGICAL MASK**

- Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. You can use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available and if your hands are not visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cough or sneeze in your sleeve and wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid sharing household items: Dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding, or other items with a person who is ill with a respiratory illness. After a person uses these items, you should wash them thoroughly.
- Clean all "high touch" surfaces, such as counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables daily.
- Monitor your symptoms – Seek medical attention if your illness is worsening and take steps to keep other people from getting infected. Call ahead and tell them you are coming, wear a facemask when you are in a room with other people. Masks are available at the entrances of most healthcare facilities.

**For the most up to date information, please visit the CDC website:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/summary.html>

**If you have any general questions, please contact your provider at  
Gila River Health Care: 520.562.3321**

**GRHC Coronavirus Hotline:  
520.550.6079**