



January 31, 2020

Dear Tribal Leaders and Tribal and Urban Indian Health Program Colleagues:

As you know, a new respiratory virus has made over 8,000 people in China ill. It is being referred to as 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019 nCoV). As of today, the number of known deaths is 213; all of them in China.

Although this is a new virus, coronaviruses are a family of viruses that are common throughout the world. In fact, some of the viruses that cause the “common cold” are coronaviruses. This new virus was first identified in Wuhan China, with the first known human infection identified in December 2019. For this reason, there is limited science available regarding transmission, severity and treatment, and there is no vaccine available for the 2019 nCoV at this time.

### **Cases in Washington**

There is 1 confirmed case in Washington State. The case is in Snohomish County and the patient is being treated. This patient became ill shortly after returning from travel to China. As of today, there are another 5 confirmed cases in the United States; in California, Arizona and Illinois.

### **What is Being Done to Control the Spread of 2019 nCoV in Washington?**

Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has initiated a broad response to implement measures that will protect all citizens. In our state, there are 9 individuals who are sick and are being tested to rule out 2019 nCoV. These individuals show symptoms that could possibly indicate 2019 nCoV, but could also be caused by other illnesses. DOH is also monitoring 67 individuals who are close contacts of the confirmed case and other potential cases, to prevent any potential spread in the community.

DOH sends daily updates to a list of tribal and urban Indian health program (UIHP) contacts. If you would like to confirm that the right individuals at your Tribe or UIHP are receiving these updates, please contact Lou Schmitz at [lou.schmitz.aihc@outlook.com](mailto:lou.schmitz.aihc@outlook.com).

The American Indian Health Commission for Washington State supports the efforts to assure effective communication with Tribes and UIHPs during public health emergencies by staffing a Tribal Liaison Officer position within the DOH’s Incident Management Team. Lou Schmitz, AIHC Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, is serving in this position. Please feel free to contact

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Lou at [lou.schmitz.aihc@outlook.com](mailto:lou.schmitz.aihc@outlook.com) if you have questions or would like additional resources.

### **How is 2019 nCoV Transmitted?**

At this time, scientists around the world are working to better understand 2019 nCoV. Current knowledge indicates that 2019 nCoV is transmitted through close person-to-person contact (about 6 feet). Respiratory droplets leave our bodies when we sneeze or cough. It is believed that, like other respiratory illnesses, 2019 nCoV is transmitted when these droplets land in the nose, mouth or eyes of another person. Research is under way to determine whether 2019 nCoV can be spread by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your nose, mouth or eyes, like influenza and other respiratory viruses. It is yet to be determined whether 2019 nCoV can be spread by individuals who do not yet show symptoms of illness.

### **How to Prevent 2019 nCoV**

While 2019 nCoV is not currently spreading in the community in the United States, it is important to recommend good handwashing practices and avoiding contact between your hands and your eyes, nose and mouth. (As of January 25, there are 52 known deaths caused by influenza in Washington State.)

### **Tribal Sovereignty and Communicable Diseases**

Tribes have the sovereign authority to determine how they will respond to communicable disease emergencies and what information regarding their community is shared.

The AIHC is committed to serve as a resource to Tribes and UIHPs to assure timely and effective communication regarding the 2019 nCoV. We will be working closely with the Washington State Department of Health and other resources. Our website will be updated regularly at: <https://aihc-wa.com/aihc-emergency-preparedness/>. Please let us know how we can be of assistance.

Respectfully,



Vicki Lowe

Executive Director

AIHC

