

Physically Distant but Socially Close

Indigenous Resilience and COVID-19

Ideas to adapt our cultural practices and love our people in new ways



Native people have cared for one another through greetings, food, dance, ceremony, and much more. These cultural practices have sustained our people through many hardships and joyful moments. We value and care about our families and communities and have always adapted to ensure the safety of the next generations. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for us to again adapt our values and show love in a new way.

“We need physical distancing and social closeness right now.”

Dr. Megan Bang (Ojibwe)

You have probably heard this called “Social distancing.” The goal is to increase physical space between individuals to help reduce the risk of spreading a disease. Keeping individuals at least six feet apart is ideal based on what is known about COVID-19,¹ but that doesn’t mean we don’t keep our people close socially and culturally.

And remember, humor is some of the best medicine!

Greetings

Greeting our family and community is an important way of showing our love and appreciation for each other, but it often requires we come within six feet of each other. Here are some alternatives to handshakes, hugs, and kisses that allow us to keep at least six feet between each other:

- Air high-five
- Point lips
- Smoke signals
- Sign language
- Fancy dance dance-off
- Sing honor song
- Breakdance battle
- Pre-record a greeting and send it while standing six feet away

Food

Gathering for food and drink is also an important value. Here are some ideas that encourage social distancing while still enjoying the gift of food and community!

- Before sharing, preparing, or serving foods, wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds
- Use above recommendations for preparing food and drop a meal of on loved one’s porch.
- Share canned goods and dry foods like beans and rice.
- Wash all dishes and utensils in between each use.
- Share your commodity cheese—share the gold!
- Try to support small businesses by ordering some food on your phone or computer.
- Send some food to your elder’s house and share a meal over Skype!

Dance

Dancing has always kept us healthy and strong. It also has brought us together as Indigenous people through social dances and powwow culture. Here are some ideas to stay socially close while still getting your physical activity.

- Always try to maintain a distance of six feet between each other.
- Have a Skype powwow with your favorite dancers!
- Teach your sibling your favorite dance move.
- Instead of dancing with friends and family, call them! Video chat. Send a text. Check in.
- Do some exercise check out Powwow Sweat on YouTube—**You ain't dead yet, lets powwow sweat!**"
- Make some regalia. Learn a new traditional craft—check out Juaquin Lonelodge's YouTube videos on making regalia.

Ceremony

Life during a pandemic can feel stressful, solitary, and scary. There are ways you can still practice ceremony while keeping socially distant.

- Smudging
- Boost your immune system
 - Take some vitamin C
 - Eat frozen fruit as a snack
 - Use plant medicines like teas, Elderberry, Cedar, Echinacea, and other immune boosters
- Practice prayer and pray with your loved ones over the phone or through video chat
- Drumming—consider a skype drum circle!
- One person sweat lodge
- Sit in silence—connect with yourself through meditation
- Bead, or learn to bead!

If you are under 60 with no underlying health conditions, offer to babysit (in groups of no more than 10 or less) for folks who still may be working and have kids at home.

Learn more about COVID-19

Urban Indian Health Institute COVID-19 resources for American Indians and Alaska Natives

uihi.org/resources/covid-19-fact-sheets-for-providers-employers-and-the-general-public/

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) COVID-19 webpage

cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov

CDC information on keeping schools, workplaces & communities safe

cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019ncov/community

References

1 Community and Community Organization Resources and Recommendations. Retrieved March, 18 2020 from www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020/CommunitiesandCommunityOrganizations