Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on coronavirus (COVID-19)

Welcome to the latest update on COVID-19 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households, communities and organisations. Things can change quickly so it’s important to stay up to date. Visit health.gov.au and niaa.gov.au for more information.

Key messages

- New modelling on the risk for remote communities
- Building healthy habits for better mental health
- How to keep our mob safe using face masks
- Help is Here for people experiencing domestic violence
- Help managing money worries
- Brother to brother – New 24 hour crisis help line for Aboriginal men

New modelling on the risk for remote communities

Our communities, particularly the remote ones, are among the most at risk when it comes to COVID-19. This is why we have to be extra careful, and work extra hard, to keep our mob safe.

New research, conducted for the Australian Government, looked at how the coronavirus would affect remote communities. It showed if one case of COVID-19 was discovered, it would be very likely that many people in the community would be infected.
This means even just one case of COVID-19 in a remote community should be treated as an outbreak.

It also shows COVID-19 is likely to spread very quickly, due to large household and frequent close mixing between households.

The research reminds us how important it is to keep COVID-19 out of remote communities. This is why we have to keep physically distancing (two big steps), washing our hands often, and staying away from other people if you are sick.

It also shows how important it is to get tested if you feel unwell, even if you’re only feeling a little bit sick. Finding the first case quickly, and isolating, is the key to stopping the spread of the virus in a community.

The research was done by the University of Melbourne and the Kirby Institute pandemic modelling team. It was guided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19 and endorsed by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC).

Results can be found here:

- Information sheet for public health professionals: COVID-19 testing and response strategies in regional and remote Indigenous communities: key messages for health services
- Presentation to help community-level planning: Impact of COVID-19 in remote and regional settings.

Help keep your mob alert, download posters and social media tiles from the toolkit here.

**Building healthy habits for better mental health**

Staying on top of our mental health is something we have to work on. Just like we have to look after our bodies by exercising, and eating and sleeping well. That means actually stopping to think about how we can make our mind healthier and improve our wellbeing. Reducing stress and anxiety are really important to feeling better.

Thankfully, there are some simple ways we can go about doing this, such as:
- getting some exercise which is good for our mind and our body
- talking about how we are feeling
- connecting with our culture
- and doing things that make us feel good like listening to music or being creative.

Another important way to help our mental health is by having healthy habits. Healthy habits and routines can give us a sense of purpose and order. It’s about taking control and managing what we can, in our own lives and in our own ways.

- Have a think about the healthy routines and habits you can start doing today. It could be making sure you get a good eight hours sleep. Or, doing regular activities like stretching, going for a walk, playing with the dog or doing some arts and crafts with your kids.
• Think about the foods you eat. Cut back on the unhealthy stuff, like foods that are full of added sugar, or high in salt and unhealthy fats.

• Make a point of contacting your mob and having good yarns to keep your spirits up. You might like to make this a part of your everyday routine.

• Try replacing smoking and drinking alcohol with healthier habits.

• For help and support to quit smoking call the Aboriginal Quitline on 13 7848 or download the My QuitBuddy mobile app.

• You can also speak to your local health service or doctor about the best way for you to go about quitting smoking or cutting down on drinking. Everyone is different and need different supports to have a healthier life.

How to keep our mob safe using face masks
Wearing a mask helps keep you and other people safe from the virus, but only if you are wearing it the right way. This includes putting it on and off the correct way.
Watch this video with Dr Ngiare Brown, a Yuin national woman and doctor who is sharing a few tips on face masks.

Want to learn more about when and how to use a mask? Read this article on the NACCHO website or visit health.gov.au for the latest advice.
Help is here for people experiencing domestic violence

During bad times, the rate of domestic violence increases in all communities and cultures. Coronavirus is causing more stress and problems for many people which can lead to violence and abuse in the home. However, there is never any excuse for domestic violence.

The Federal Government has launched the Help is Here campaign. This gives extra support to people who are suffering domestic violence or feel they’re at risk. Reaching out can be the first step to keeping yourself and your family safe. Remind communities, Help is Here.

Help with managing money worries

Money worries can have a big impact on your mental health. You could be stressing about being able to pay bills or your rent, having enough money for food, or paying off debts and loans. These types of fears can affect anyone, from all communities and backgrounds. Worrying about money can cause problems in your relationships too.

It’s important to get help and support as early as possible. Signs that worry is affecting your health include:

- arguing with people in your family about money
- not sleeping well
- feeling angry or scared
- having mood swings
- feeling tired
• not eating well
• not feeling like being around other people.

It’s normal to feel these things sometimes. But if you feel this way for too long it can be bad for your health and lead to other problems.

If you’re worried about money, or anything else, it’s better to talk to someone about it than keep it all to yourself. You can speak to a counsellor who’ll listen to your problems and help you make a plan.

Ways to seek financial support:

• Services Australia can help you with income support and support for households
• Australian Taxation Office can help with early access to superannuation. Help is also available for eligible businesses, including boosting cash flow and JobKeeper payments
• The National Debt Helpline gives free, independent and private advice from a financial adviser - call 1800 007 007. They also have financial guides available.

Brother to Brother - a new 24-hour crisis line for Aboriginal men

Dardi Munwurro (Strong Spirit) is an Aboriginal organisation that supports people suffering family violence. It has a range of family violence programs for Aboriginal men.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, Dardi Munwurro has launched Brother to Brother, a 24/7 crisis line for Aboriginal men.

The crisis line gives phone support to Aboriginal men who need someone to talk to. You can ring about relationship problems, family violence, parenting, drug and alcohol issues or if you are struggling to cope for any other reason.

The line is run by Aboriginal men, including Elders, who have experience in these issues. The crisis line number is 1800 435 799.