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, “continuing to check in with our 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 serve 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 switch 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.

Advocators 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 Changed.

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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 countries 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.

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Gila River Health Care

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

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Gila River Indian News
Community Services and Public Safety addressing needs 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-kii 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.

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 activities 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 preparing meals and offering a variety of academic and recreational activities. Children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian as day programs are suspended until further notice.

If you are interested in enrolling more, they advise contacting your local branch to learn about the capacity limits, hours, and information on the safety of germs and infectious disease.

Affects on Community Members

Antone, 15-years-old, is a sophomore attending Skyline Gila River. Antone initially attended the required queue in order to catch up on classes that were missed. But even during this time, Antone has continued to help others.

Antone said, “I'm on the youth basketball team through GRIC, and we have games every day. Although we can't play our games, we're still coming to the gym to practice. So, we're still practicing and we're still keeping busy and staying fit.”

Antone said he doesn’t offer a lot of help, he said he just wants to keep the kids engaged and active during this time.

The Community Services Department has begun preventative measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by cancelling senior recreational activities and closure of all fitness centers, food rooms, recreation activities, and computer labs. All branches are closed until further notice.

The districts are still open and providing services.

The Elder Services Program has issued a notice to the elder community on Monday, March 16, that all new requests for services 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 Elder Services is (520) 562-5322 or the Elder Coordinator, Linda Miles can be reached at (480) 653-6908.

Gila River Fire Dep-artment is involved and working with community leaders, the Public Safety Divisions and other Communities to combat COVID-19 (coronavirus). Currently they are taking extra precautions and equipping firefighters with additional protective equipment due to the significant threat of COVID-19 posed to the Community members 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 themselves be exposed to COVID-19. They have reduced their non-essential interaction with the public as well as suspending group dining and remaining on six-feet, recommended by the CDC.

Alan Sinclair FMO-BIA, and type 1 Incident Commander for the Southern West Area Incident Management Team #1 (one of 15 National IMT’s) has mentored many employees over the years, 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 coordinating 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 been asked to ask a few short additional questions when in contacting the public, 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 they have had any contact with someone who has flu-like symptoms. GRPD is asking everyone to please be patient with public safety dispatcher and first responders as these additional steps are needed to ensure further safety.

Non-priority calls such as property crimes that are not taking place at the time, or any calls that would be handled via telephone by an officer.

Currently no known crimes within the Community are linked to COVID-19. Despite national questions when inquiring about a call or incident, the officers, staff, and the Community. GRPD’s mobile app is available for download and contains more information, such as collected weather and fires tips, and now more information on COVID-19 from GRIC and GRHP.

As mentioned everyone should wash their hands often with soap and water. Use a hand sanitiz-er, when soap and water are not available. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Avoid close contact with sick people, and don’t touch your face.

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

DISTRICT SERVICE CENTERS

• District 1 Service Center
15747 North Shego 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 Shego 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
9079 E. District 5 Road, Coolidge, AZ 85128
Phone: (520) 562-3450

• District 6 Service Center
15747 North Shego Road, Coolidge, AZ 85128
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In addition to the new hours, branches are preparing meals and offering a variety of academic and recreational activities. Children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian as day programs are suspended until further notice. 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 sanitizer stations all around.

“We understand that parents may not want their kids to go to school, but 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 meals for a specific group of kids, many club staff are purchasing breakfast meals for all members that are present.

For now, Boys and Girls Clubs will continue to operate with the change to canceling school. Traditionally, school break while schools remain closed or if they are recommended to shutdown.

Their computer labs assist students that may have online instruction during school closures. Students are using room/morning hours to attend to the new Club hours while increasing their computer skills and coding efforts for members and surfaces in the Club.

Tamarra Peters, Program Director for the Gila River Indian Community’s Kid’s Care, said they are doing everything in their power to prevent the power of germs and infectious disease. Facility. Upon entering, visitors must wash their hands and use hand sanitizer before entering any room in the Club.

And lastly, the 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 part to ensure that both students and parents have the resources needed to help you complete the semester successfully. We wish you good health and peace during this time.”

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Stay at home when you are sick. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue 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 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, but 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 GRIC 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 of 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 set up at several entrances at each of the GRHC campuses, including dialysis centers, where they will be checked on 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, intensive care, 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, dia-betics, those suffering from cardiovasculardisease, the elderly and those with some comorbid conditions have higher mortality rates for COVID-19.
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has announced that the NOVEL CORONAVIRUS is Now (COVID-19)

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 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