

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 care for one another through greetings, food, dance, ceremony, and much more. These cultural practices have sustained our people through many hardships and been a way to celebrate joyful moments. We deeply value our families and communities and have always adapted to ensure the safety of the next generations. In the face of COVID-19, it is important for us to hold our values close while also adapting the ways we show love.

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

—Dr. Megan Bang (Ojibwe)

You have probably heard of this idea called **“social distancing.”** This means limiting close face-to-face contact with others to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (CDC, 2020a). Combined with masks and hand hygiene, maintaining at least six feet distance is the best way to keep our relatives safe (CDC, 2020a), but that doesn’t mean we can’t keep our people socially and culturally close!

**And do not forget, humor is one of the best medicines!**

## Greetings

Greeting our family and community is an important way to show our love and appreciation for each other, but it often requires us to come within six feet of each other. Here are some alternatives to handshakes, hugs, and kisses:

- Air high-five
- Point lips
- Smoke signals
- Sign language
- Fancy dance dance-off
- Sing an honor song
- Breakdance battle
- Send a pre-recorded greeting from your phone

## Food

Coming together to visit and share a meal is also an important value. The safest way to do this is to gather at home with people you live with. If you are with those outside your household here are ways to enjoy the gift of food and community (CDC, 2020b):

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Wear a face mask, keep social distance, gather outdoors, and consider bringing your own food and utensils.

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Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, before preparing, sharing, serving, or eating food.

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Drop a homecooked meal off on a loved one’s porch.

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Avoid sharing any items that are difficult to clean and disinfect in between uses.

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Share your commodity cheese—share the gold!

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Support a small business by picking up or having a meal delivered to your door.

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Send a meal to your elder’s house and share a meal over Skype or FaceTime!

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Boost your immune system (Krohn et al., 2020).

- Eat foods high in vitamins, like citrus fruits, green vegetables, and mushrooms.
- Use immune-supportive plant medicines like echinacea, elderberry, and licorice in teas and syrups.
- Eat frozen fruit as a cool snack.

## Dance

Dancing has always kept us healthy and strong and will continue to bring us together as Indigenous people. Despite cancelled or virtual powwows, we can still dance to stay healthy, strong, and connected. Here are some ideas to stay socially close and get your physical activity while maintaining a distance of six feet (CDC, 2020a).

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It's safest to only dance with those that live in the same home as you.

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If you do choose to dance with others, maintain six feet distance, wear a mask, and dance outdoors.

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Have a virtual powwow with your favorite dancers.

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Record a video of yourself doing your favorite dance move and send it to your relatives!

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Instead of dancing with friends and family, call them! Video chat. Send a text. Check in.

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Do some exercise at home. Check out Powwow Sweat on YouTube—**"You ain't dead yet, let's powwow sweat!"**

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Make some regalia or learn a new traditional craft—search for Juaquin Lonelodge on YouTube for videos on how to make regalia.

## Ceremony

Life during a pandemic can feel stressful, solitary, and scary. During this challenging time, we must honor our Indigenous knowledge, assert our resilience, and find ways to practice ceremony while keeping socially distant (Krohn et al., 2020).

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Smudge with your favorite plant medicine.

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Pray with your loved ones over the phone or through video chat.

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Drum—consider a virtual drum circle.

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Participate in a one-person sweat lodge.

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Sit in silence—connect with yourself through meditation.

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Bead, or learn to bead.

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Play or learn a traditional instrument.

## Learn more about COVID-19

**Urban Indian Health Institute COVID-19 resources for American Indians and Alaska Natives**  
[uihi.org/covid](https://uihi.org/covid)

**CDC COVID-19 webpage**  
[cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov)

**CDC information on keeping schools, workplaces and communities safe**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

**Immune and Respiratory Herbs: A resource for tribal communities during COVID-19**  
<https://www.uihi.org/resources/immune-respiratory-herbs/>

## References

1. CDC. (2020a, February 11). Social Distancing | Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>
2. CDC. (2020b, April 30). Considerations for Events and Gatherings | COVID-19. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>
3. Krohn, E., Segrest, V., Davis, R., Grantham, R., & Geist, S. (2020). Immune & Respiratory Herbs and Herbal Support During the COVID-19 Outbreak. Urban Indian Health Institute. <https://www.uihi.org/resources/immune-respiratory-herbs/>