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## For Immediate Release

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### Gila River Indian Community Confirms First Positive Tests for COVID-19 Coronavirus

(Sacaton, Arizona) Two patients who presented themselves to Gila River Health Care (GRHC) with symptoms indicative of possible COVID-19 were tested, and those test results were returned today, showing that both were confirmed as positive. The tests were taken last week, and the results were returned today. One of the patients is a Gila River Indian Community member, and one is a member of another federally recognized Indian tribe.

Both patients are currently in isolation at home pursuant to medical instruction and do not require hospitalization at this time. Preventive measures have been taken to isolate and screen all others who have come in contact with the patients before diagnosis and within the incubation period.

Governor Stephen Roe Lewis stated, "We have done several tests to date, and were prepared for today's development of having our first ones come back positive. Fortunately, out of the 39 tests that were conducted, there were only two positive results received. The bad news is, it is likely that we will see more in the coming days. That is a fact of life at this point. It is also a fact that the Community is taking aggressive actions to respond to the pandemic and stay ahead of it. And you can do your part too."

On January 29th, 2020, the Community formed a COVID-19 Task Force to prepare for possible cases being identified in the Community. Gila River Health Care has taken steps to implement a COVID-19 Unified Incident Command System and is ramping up its ability to treat patients if that were to become necessary. In addition, the Community has taken action to reduce the potential spread of the virus by closing its gaming enterprises and its schools and limiting meetings to no more than ten persons in compliance with established guidelines. Today, Governor Lewis issued four new Executive Orders addressing the pandemic, including reducing government functions to essential employees and prohibiting evictions and any utility shut-offs for the duration of the pandemic emergency. This is in

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(More)



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addition to other actions already taken. Governor Lewis added, “We are working 24/7 to stay ahead of the curve on this and will continue to do so as we go forward.”

To aid in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, Gila River Health Care has taken the following measures to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19:

- All elective procedures (i.e., Dental, Optometry) have been canceled
- All visitors, patients, and staff are screened upon entry to all GRHC facilities
- Restricted visitation at all facilities

Per Dr. Anthony Santiago, Chief Medical Officer and Interim Chief Executive Officer of Gila River Health Care, “Patients and members of the Gila River Indian Community can help protect themselves and others by limiting their social outings as person-to-person contact is the greatest risk for contracting the virus. They should regularly wash their hands and wipe down high-touch surfaces such as counter tops and cell phones as the virus can live on surfaces for up to 2 days. The best way to treat COVID-19 is to prevent having it in the first place.”

Dr. Santiago went on to say, “We are confident we have taken the steps necessary to protect our employees and be prepared for the coming days. While we wish there will be no further patients with COVID-19, we have to accept that there will be. But I want to assure all Community members that together with our Board of Directors and the Community’s leaders, we have been preparing for this day and the next tough days ahead.

"Please remember that everyone in the Community can help by taking this very seriously. To protect yourself and loved ones, please come to the hospital if you are ill. But if you are simply worried because you may know someone who is ill, and you are well, please call our hotline to talk to one of our healthcare providers rather than come here and put yourself at risk of contact with a sick patient. We need to focus on those who have symptoms of COVID-19. If you do have symptoms, which again include fever/chills, cough, shortness of breath, please tell the first person you see at the hospital entrance so they can give you a mask to wear and we will be prepared to examine and test you if indicated.”



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Governor Lewis closed by stating, “Now is a time for everyone to know we have your back. We ask that you, please allow the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) unified Incident Command System, which is comprised of Gila River Health Care (GRHC), GRIC Tribal Health Department, and the Office of Emergency Management, to control, assess and reduce the risk to the Community at large.”

Resources available:

- GRHC Coronavirus Hotline: (520) 550-6079 Dedicated Webpage: [GRHC.ORG/CORONAVIRUS](http://GRHC.ORG/CORONAVIRUS)
- [www.fema.gov/Coronavirus-Rumor-Control](http://www.fema.gov/Coronavirus-Rumor-Control)
- [AZDHS.org](http://AZDHS.org)
- Arizona dedicated info line: 211

The GRHC hotline is available 24/7 for all GRIC and non-GRIC tribal members who have healthcare-related questions regarding the virus. Those experiencing a fever, cough and trouble breathing are advised to contact the hotline or their health care provider for assistance. To date, there have been 234 known cases of COVID-19 (139 of which are in Maricopa County).

Per the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in people and many different species of animals, including camels, cattle, cats, and bats. At this time, however, most people in the United States will have a minimal immediate risk of exposure to this virus. However, people with serious chronic medical conditions are at heightened risk.”

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*Gila River Indian Community located on 372,000 acres in south-central Arizona and home to the indigenous O’odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) people. The Tribe is comprised of seven districts, the administrative offices and departments are located in Sacaton, and serve the people throughout these seven community districts. 100% of its profits from gaming and 17 other Enterprises are utilized by the community providing services and opportunities to achieve the highest quality of life.*