

Yurok Tribal Council votes to close reservation

December 7, 2020



In response to the rapidly increasing number of COVID-19 cases in the region, the Yurok Tribal Council voted to close the Yurok Reservation for three weeks starting Monday.

“We are taking every available precaution to protect our elders, individuals with preexisting health conditions and the whole community. Since the start of this emergency, we have exercised an abundance of caution because we know the potential impacts of widespread disease,” said Joseph L. James, the chairman of the Yurok Tribe. “We will reopen when we see a consistent decline in infection rates. The closure is one part of a comprehensive plan to prevent the spread of the illness.”

“We need everyone to play active role in stopping the spread of the virus,” said Serene Hayden, the Yurok Tribe’s incident commander. “We strongly encourage residents to practice all of the personal safety measures, such as wearing a face covering in public, avoiding large gatherings and staying home as much as possible.”

To date, there have been 15 COVID-19 cases on the reservation, 10 of which were confirmed late last week. In addition to wearing a mask while outside of the home, reservation residents are advised to refrain from travelling off-reservation unless it is for essential purposes, such as medical appointments and visits to the grocery store. COVID-19 testing is available five days per week in Klamath and Weitchpec.

The COVID-19 Temporary Closure Order applies to nearly all non-residents. Those authorized to enter the reservation include but are not limited to the following: essential tribal staff, law enforcement, emergency medical personnel, commercial service providers, social service providers and through travelers driving on the local highways and county roads.

On March 13, the Yurok Tribal Council declared a state of emergency to activate the tribe's incident management team. In early April, the tribe closed the reservation following a local rise in COVID-19 cases. A phased reopening of the reservation began in October when there were far fewer instances of the illness and local non-essential businesses were allowed to resume operations on a modified scale. The conditions did not permit a full reopening. However, the tribal government is functioning at full capacity with non-emergency staff working from home.

The Yurok Office of Emergency Services recently moved the Yurok Reservation to Tier 1 on the community risk level chart, which is the most restrictive stage. Humboldt and Del Norte counties are also in Tier 1.

All non-essential tribal buildings are currently closed. Pem-mey and Pek-Tah Fuel Marts were deemed essential. Both facilities have altered operations to keep patrons and staff safe. The Redwood Hotel Casino is closed to tourists, but essential personnel will continue to occupy a small number of rooms.

The Yurok Tribe has mounted a comprehensive effort to confront the public health, social and economic aspects of the COVID-19 crisis. Tribal staff have delivered thousands of food boxes and PPE to Yurok elders. Students have received high quality distance learning tools. The tribe implemented a forgivable loan program for Yurok businesses. It has also distributed direct aid to Yurok elders, families and individuals as well as many other types of assistance, too.

For additional information on the Tribe's COVID-19 response effort, please visit [Yurokoes.org](https://yurokoes.org)