

## Yurok Tribe increases services available to reservation residents during pandemic

April 19, 2020



The Yurok Tribe has made much progress toward mitigating local impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

To date, the Tribe has mobilized an Incident Command team, comprised of more than 80 staff members, to confront the many facets of this unparalleled public health emergency. Working seven days a week, the Incident Command team, led by Serene Hayden and Rod Mendes, has made headway in a number of areas, ranging from food access to public safety. The Yurok Office of Emergency Services has established four task forces focused on implementing actions directed at the following components of the crisis: elders, public health, resource acquisition and education.

“We have made a significant amount of progress on several fronts,” said Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. “I want to thank our staff and our partners for working around-the-clock to address the many challenges posed by this emergency. I also want to thank all of the people in our community who are

physical distancing and staying home. While we still have a long road ahead of us, we are moving in a positive direction.”

On April 6, the Yurok Tribal Council closed the reservation to non-essential personnel for the first time to proactively protect residents and prevent the spread of COVID-19. To increase the effectiveness of the closure, the Tribe is providing resources to help residents shelter-in-place. Additionally, the Yurok Tribal Police Department has increased patrols to enforce the temporary closure. The Humboldt and Del Norte County Sheriffs’ Offices support for the reservation closure.

“Normally, we welcome visitors with open arms as treating guests with hospitality is a traditional Yurok value. Right now, we need to take advantage of every opportunity to protect our most vulnerable citizens,” Chairman James said.

In multiple ways, the Tribe is assisting reservation residents in staying home as much as possible. Yurok Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Yurok Economic Development Corporation, is delivering food and other critical supplies to Tribal elders and immunosuppressed individuals in need.

The primary purpose of the food distribution effort is to ensure that these susceptible groups do not have to travel to the market, or more populated areas, where there is a much larger risk of exposure to the virus.

To request a food box, please call 1-888-225-8952. The Yurok Fire Department and the Forestry Department are regularly delivering firewood to at-risk elder residents, too. In addition to the firewood and food box deliveries, Yurok Health and Human Services is offering a 30-day supply of groceries to those eligible to enroll in the Yurok Food Distribution Program. This program is open to Del Norte and Humboldt County residents, who are citizens of any federally recognized Tribe and have been laid off or have lost work hours due to the emergency.

The food relief is also open to non-Tribal citizens living on the reservation. Applications can be acquired by phone at (707) 464-1852 or online at <https://bit.ly/3em8Hjq> Services for existing Food Distribution Program participants will not be altered and will continue throughout the crisis.

The Tribe is in regular communication with emergency managers from the nearby Tribes and counties. At the request of Yurok OES, the United Indian Health Services has assigned a public health officer to assist the Tribe in acquiring additional healthcare resources for the Tribal community.

“We are coordinating our response efforts with the staff and leadership from our neighboring Tribes, agencies and counties,” said Frankie Myers, the Yurok Tribe’s Vice-Chairman. “We greatly appreciate the strong relationship we have with our Tribal and non-Tribal partners.”

Tribal government continues to operate during crisis

Although all Tribal offices are closed to the public to protect citizens and staff, the Tribe continues to offer most of the services that it administered prior to the emergency. The dispensation of Tribal services has been modified to ensure the safety of clients and employees. Here is a breakdown of the services currently

available, including descriptions of the modifications that have been made to serve the community in a safe manner.

- All of Yurok Health and Human Services programs, including Food Distribution, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Burial Assistance, General Assistance and Low Income Energy Assistance, are accessible to those in need. Yurok TANF is accepting new applicants. Staff are available to take applications by phone from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
- Next week, YHHS's Food Distribution Program will also begin offering disaster food boxes to Yurok Tribal citizens in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties. Tribal citizens struggling because of the crisis are eligible for this service. Elders and other vulnerable residents will be served first and the boxes will go out on a weekly basis. Please note that signing up for the 30-day supply of food from the Food Distribution Program is recommended for income eligible families and those with dependents. To sign up for a disaster food box, please call 1-888-225-8952.
- The Yurok Education Department is working creatively to help youth of all ages continue their learning during the pandemic. The department is providing homework packets to Head Start students. For the older children, Education staff is offering tutoring through digital platforms, which are also being used to teach the Yurok language. The Yurok Language Program is regularly posting educational videos on Facebook and YouTube. Here is a link to the Language Program's Facebook page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/yuroktribelanguage/>
- Yurok Connect waived fees for internet services for all patrons during the month of April to reduce the financial strain experienced by many families and individuals.
- To assist families in Tribal housing, the Yurok Indian Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners voted to waive all rents for the month of April. YIHA also delivered shelter-in-place boxes to the 51 elders it serves. The boxes include: Kleenex, Tylenol, cleaning supplies, blanket, crossword book, cough drops, and tea.
- The Tribe performs an immense amount of research on the Klamath River and its tributaries. Yurok Tribe
- Environmental Program scientists and technicians are continuing to compile important data on many facets of the watershed, including water quality, wetland diversity and ecosystem health. To accurately identify long-term trends and to make management decisions, it is critical to collect complete data over a significant period of time. In light of the need for physical distancing, the Environmental Program has altered its data collection procedure to protect the health of the dedicated staff who are gathering this invaluable information.
- Due to the risks posed by COVID-19, the Yurok Tribe Transit Service has changed how services are offered. The Yurok Tribe Transit Service will continue to assist the community by providing medical transportation with the limit of one passenger at a time.

- An information line has been set up to answer community members questions. The phone number is 1-888-225-8952 and it is now staffed by a person seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.