

Hitting the peak

Written by By Dominic Aragon Sun Correspondent
Friday, 29 May 2020 03:48



The Navajo Nation faces the predicted peak of COVID-19

Social distancing measures are working on the Navajo Nation, Dr. Loretta Christensen, the chief medical officer for the Navajo Area Indian Health Service, believes.

In a conference call with reporters that included Rear Adm. Michael Toedt, M.D.; the chief medical officer with IHS, Christensen praised Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez on the efforts to curb COVID-19 cases from climbing on the reservation.

“I do believe [safety measures] are working. I think we would have had a lot more volume, and positive patients if we hadn’t done the social distancing,” Christensen said.

“I think the continued message is to still stay home, not go shopping in groups, not gather. Don’t go back to what was being done before,” she said.

What people do now, the benefits or effects will be seen in one to two weeks, Christensen added.

Christensen said the ascent of the curve appears to be flattening across the Navajo Nation.

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“I want to clarify that when I said we were going to hit our peak around May 10, that I was referring to our capacity to take care of patients, and that pretty much did happen. We filled up our three largest hospitals,” she said.

“The actual peak for this entire area was predicted to be in the last two weeks of May, so that still remains to be seen,” Christensen said

The Navajo Nation sits at over 4K COVID-19 cases as of May 18.

Within the entire Indian Health Services, over 62K people have been tested with nearly 6K testing positive for COVID-19 as of May 12.

“As we continue to work together across Indian Country during this unprecedented time, I remain encouraged by the dedication and partnerships we have with our tribal and Indian communities. We know these are challenging times for everyone, but we are all in this together,” Toedt said.

In town, the Gallup Indian Medical Center continues to treat people with COVID-19.

Christensen said the hospital is seeing a large number of patients at the 99-bed hospital, and that screening, testing, and hospitalization have been a challenge during the pandemic.

“We continue to support them through all those needs,” she said.

By Dominic Aragon
Sun Correspondent