COVID-19: Culturally safe practice with Aboriginal families and communities

Many Aboriginal families may be more vulnerable to getting sick and being sicker during the COVID-19 pandemic. In part, this is due to many years of social disadvantage, health problems, and poverty as a result of colonisation.

During the 2009 swine flu outbreak, Aboriginal people made up a fifth of those hospitalised and 13% of those who died – even though they make up about 3% of Australia's population.

Aboriginal people most at risk are those who are:

- Elders
- experiencing pre-existing conditions like diabetes, heart problems, lung illness and smoking
- living in remote communities with less access to health services and resources.

Seeking Aboriginal consultation is more important now than ever. Seek advice from your local [Aboriginal Medical Service](#) before going out to small and remote communities.

What this means for your practice

Consideration	What to do
Aboriginal communities have a strong connection to family and social ways of life, so keeping a distance from people to stop the spread of COVID-19 can be hard.	**Listen**, respect and acknowledge what families believe works best to keep these connections strong, while keeping everyone well and safe (especially the most vulnerable). **Ask** how you can support them.
These strong family and community networks are the key to keeping Aboriginal children safe and cared for during the pandemic.	**Listen** and observe the ways families will draw on their own support network, while keeping everyone well. **Ask** how you can support safe connections so children are not isolated from their usual supports.

Community leaders and families are already taking measures to protect their communities.	**Consult** with the 'go- to' people locally in families, community and DCJ. **Listen** to what is working well and how you can increase access and give practical assistance to what families need to keep safe and well – without introducing more risk or fear.
Remote communities may have less access to health services and necessary resources. Some families will be reluctant to seek medical or social support due to fear of what it will mean for their children	**Listen** to what families need. **Ask** for ways we can support access to culturally safe medical care and resources for families - without bringing more risk into their community. **Follow through** on finding ways to support families or get them access to support services and resources so that they can get through the pandemic.
Particular language or words could cause fear or distrust amongst Aboriginal people.	**Share** information using straight-forward words – think about the impact of words like infection *control,* social *isolation,* and *government mandates* on families. Wherever possible, share information developed for Aboriginal communities. Helpful links are provided below. **Listen** to families and community for the best way to talk about keeping well and safe.
Children in care may have limited or postponed family time during the pandemic and less access to cultural activities, community members and events.	**Connect** with the child's cultural network. **Listen** to their suggestions about how the child can continue to maintain cultural connections in ways that are safe. This may include phone or video calls and non-group cultural activities, cultural books and resources.

Helpful links

For health information and resources about Covid-19 specifically about and for Aboriginal communities:

[National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation](#)

[Australian Indigenous Health*InfoNet*](#)

[Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council NSW](#)

Find your local [Aboriginal Medical Service](#).

Follow all [DCJ Coronavirus advice and guidelines](#) during this time*.*