



Navajo Nation Council, University of Arizona partnership sends 250 COVID-19 test kits to Navajo health care facilities

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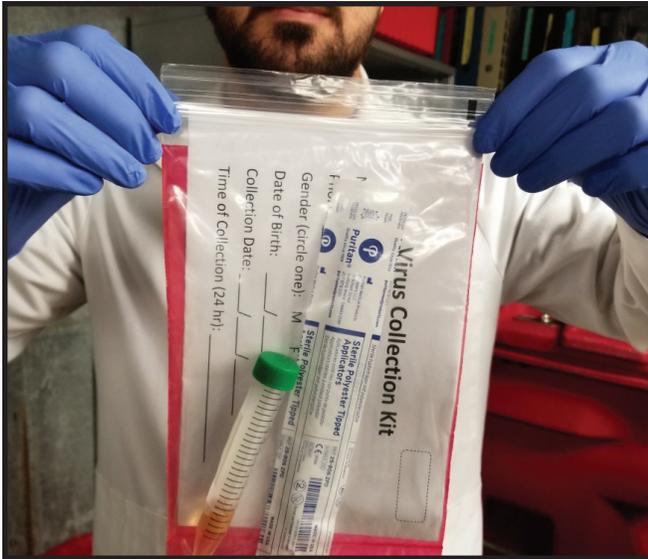


PHOTO: Virus collection kits were assembled by University of Arizona Health Sciences Biorepository team members to help alleviate local shortages of COVID-19 testing kits. UofA donated 250 test kits to the Navajo Nation on Thursday. (Photo courtesy of the University of Arizona Health Sciences)

The University of Arizona Health Sciences Biorepository began producing the COVID-19 testing kits last week in response to a significant shortage of kits across the country and southwestern Arizona region. The team began receiving necessary materials at the university last week and started assembling each component in their lab facility.

Testing kits produced by the team are made of two main components: the swabs and the viral transport medium that secures the sample taken from a patient.

“Fortunately, our personnel at the Biorepository have several decades of experience in creating bio specimen collection kits for use in FDA-approved analyses and clinical applications,” said David Harris last week. Harris is the director of the biorepository.

Over the past week, the university began distributing test kits to regional medical facilities to help address the immediate demand.

The test kits donated to the Navajo Nation are part of a direct outreach effort between the two leaders. The coronavirus test kits will be delivered to a central Navajo Nation facility and distributed to other facilities based on need.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Speaker Seth Damon and University of Arizona President Robert C. Robbins announced Thursday that 250 COVID-19 test kits will be donated to the Navajo Nation to help meet the rapidly growing need for coronavirus testing.

“On behalf of the Navajo Nation, I thank President Robbins for his leadership and commitment to the health and wellbeing of our students,” said Speaker Damon. “More than that, these testing kits made by the University of Arizona will help greatly in the Navajo Nation’s battle against the rapidly growing numbers of confirmed positive coronavirus cases among the Navajo population.”

“Like many, the Navajo Nation has been hard hit by the coronavirus and needs these tests to help protect their people,” said University of Arizona President Robert C. Robbins. “We are sending these sample collection kits in the hopes they can assist in their efforts to address COVID-19.”

The University of Arizona's commitment to the Navajo Nation's COVID-19 response efforts also includes donations of other supplies and personal protective equipment. 200 bottles of hand sanitizer have been donated by Drs. Viswanathan and Vedantam. Both doctors have temporarily paused normal research work to allow their labs to be utilized to make the sanitizer from lab materials.

Additionally, the university has secured, on behalf of the Navajo Nation, 10,000 medical gloves provided by Campus Health, 2,000 gloves provided by UA Athletics Medical Services, 100 surgical masks provided by Drs. Viswanathan and Vedantam, 100 hand-sewn surgical masks provided by local Tucson seamstress Chrystine Druge and other miscellaneous cleaning supplies.

"The University of Arizona is doing something we, as a Nation, and our UofA students can be proud of, and that's to 'Bear Down' as we prepare for the larger surge of cases on the Navajo Nation," said Speaker Damon. "We are truly thankful for every bit of assistance from the university and our partners everywhere."

The Navajo Nation health care system is comprised mainly of a combination of 13 federal Indian Health Service facilities and tribally-controlled health care centers. An estimated 200,000 people live on the Navajo Nation that are served by these facilities. Across the Navajo Nation, a reported 170 beds and fewer than 30 ventilators are available to serve the entire on-reservation population. As of Wednesday, 214 positive COVID-19 cases were reported on the Navajo Nation and seven deaths have been confirmed.

The Navajo Nation government has responded to the spread of COVID-19 to the Navajo Nation by declaring a state of emergency and issuing greater restrictions on employee travel, government gatherings and more. The latest action issued under the emergency declaration requires all Navajo citizens to comply with a daily curfew from 8:00PM-5:00AM. Previously, the Navajo Nation Council appropriated \$5.3 million to help mobilize the Navajo Department of Health and local chapter governments.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued official guidelines stating all COVID-19 testing should be conducted by a healthcare provider and only for patients demonstrating symptoms of the coronavirus. As of April 2, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has not authorized any COVID-19 testing kits that can be purchased from private companies for people to perform self-testing at home.

"It's critical that we get the correct information to the public," said Speaker Damon.

The University of Arizona also noted Thursday the administration is working with the Navajo Nation to coordinate assistance for Navajo students attending UA. The university plans to do health checks and is working to continue education on-line.

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