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### **Public Notice from Tribal Chief Cyrus Ben**

Halito, Tribal Members –

As many of you are aware, there is a growing concern throughout the country regarding the COVID-19 virus, or Coronavirus, outbreak. We now have a confirmed case in the State of Mississippi.

The COVID-19 outbreak is believed to have begun in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, and soon spread person-to-person outside of China including here in the United States. It is expected that more cases of COVID-19 will be identified in the U.S. in the coming days. However, for the majority of people, the immediate risk of being exposed to the virus is thought to be low. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough and shortness of breath, and these symptoms may appear 2 to 14 days after exposure.

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness and is spread much like the flu. The virus can be spread between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes, although this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

In any emergency situation, it always helps to be prepared. Therefore, I have initiated a COVID-19 Preparedness Team made up of officials from the Choctaw Health Center. These individuals are in contact with officials at the Mississippi State Department of Health and Indian Health Services (IHS) to get the latest and most accurate information to ensure the Tribe is well-informed and prepared to handle any emergency situation that arises from COVID-19.

However, I would like to share with you some simple steps that YOU can take to be prepared. As mentioned earlier, COVID-19 spreads mainly from an infected person

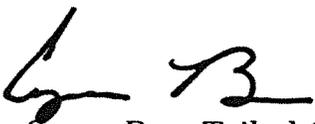
who coughs, or sneezes close by another person. So, wash your hands often. It is recommended you wash your hands vigorously with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If you cannot wash your hands with soap and water, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Avoid close contact with anyone who is sick. If you are sick, please stay home and contact your health provider for further direction. If you will be in contact with other people, cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily using regular household disinfectants. These are just some simple ways to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 or other illnesses, such as the cold or the flu.

Please note that older adults, such as our Tribal Elders, along with individuals with compromised immune systems, and individuals who have serious chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, lung disease and kidney disease, are more at risk to develop a severe case of COVID-19. However, you can help them be prepared by making sure they follow the above steps and limit their exposure by keeping them at home as much as possible, cancelling any unnecessary travel on airplanes, and cruise ships, and by avoiding areas where there will be a large gathering of people. This really goes for anyone who wants to limit their exposure as much as possible. This is valuable advice for everyone to help limit their exposure to COVID-19.

Please note, if you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and may have had contact with a person with COVID-19, or recently traveled to countries with apparent community spread, call the Public Health Department at the Choctaw Health Center at 601-389-4110 Monday-Friday, 8am-4:40pm or after hours call 601-389-4500 first before seeking medical care so that appropriate precautions can be taken.

As with any emerging threat, our knowledge continues to grow daily. I am confident in the abilities of our Tribal health officials and our IHS and state partners to make sure we are on top of this situation. I urge you to be prepared and to be vigilant. Please keep checking our Tribal website ([www.choctaw.org](http://www.choctaw.org)) and our Tribal Facebook page (Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians) for updates. If you would like further information about COVID-19, please visit [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html).

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Cyrus Ben, Tribal Chief