

# BEMIDJI AREA MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH AND COVID-19 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## **Maternal and Child Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The emergence of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in late 2019 has had an effect on many aspects of health and healthcare-related activities. Preexisting disparities, like those experienced by populations such as American Indian/Alaska Native women and children, are often magnified by major events like a pandemic. Furthermore, the health impacts of a pandemic can spread beyond physical health into emotional, mental, and spiritual health.

## **Maternal and Child Health and COVID-19 Needs Assessment**

Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Epidemiology Center (GLITEC) conducted a needs assessment that covered aspects of maternal and child health among American Indian/Alaska Native communities. The goal of the assessment was to identify the most pressing issues faced by these populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This survey was sent to Tribal Leaders, Health Directors, and others who work in maternal and child health within American Indian/Alaska Native communities. The survey included questions on subpopulations and activities within maternal and child health including:

- Pregnant women;
- Labor, delivery, and hospital stays;
- Postpartum women;
- Children and adolescents;
- Women of reproductive age;
- Families; and
- Clinics and organizations.

Respondents were asked to what extent each of the aspects and activities under maternal and child health had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The options included large effect, some effect, small effect, no effect, or I don't know.

The majority of respondents worked in a Tribal community (73.4%). The majority also worked directly with patients or clients (75.0%).

A few of the most affected aspects identified by this assessment were women of reproductive age delaying or skipping well-woman visits (100.0% chose large or some effect), the reduced ability for families to participate in traditional activities (97.0%), and increase in anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns among women of reproductive age (96.9%).

Increase in anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns appeared as one of the most affected aspects under multiple subpopulations including pregnant women, postpartum women, and families. The top effect of COVID-19 on children and adolescents was the decreased ability to play, participate in sports, and be physically active (94.4%). The top concern for clinics and organizations was seeing patients in the clinic (96.8%).

The findings from this assessment will be used by GLITEC to further examine the effects of COVID-19 on maternal and child health in American Indian/Alaska Native communities and ultimately develop, disseminate, and implement recommendations to communities.

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**Table 1. Most Affected Aspects Under Maternal and Child Health, by Percent of Respondents Who Chose “Large Effect” or “Some Effect”, by Subpopulation or Setting**

	Percent Who Chose Large or Some Effect*
<b>Pregnant Women</b>	
Increase in anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns	86.4%
Reduced access to mental health and/or substance abuse services	80.4%
Reduced access to childbirth education	78.6%
<b>Labor, Delivery, and Hospital Stays</b>	
Insufficient support during labor	83.9%
Women not able to have any companion of choice during labor	71.9%
Inability to have a doula	62.5%
<b>Postpartum Women</b>	
Lack of social support/increased social isolation	96.8%
Inability to receive postpartum home visiting services	92.6%
Increase in anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns	90.0%
<b>Children and Adolescents</b>	
Decreased ability to play, participate in sports, and be physically active	94.4%
Delays/skipping going to well-child visits or healthy teen checkups	94.3%
Staying up-to-date on childhood immunizations	94.1%
<b>Women of Reproductive Age</b>	
Delays/skipping well-woman visits	100.0%
Increase in anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns	96.9%
Decreased access to screening for health conditions	96.7%
<b>Families</b>	
Reduced ability to participate in traditional activities	97.0%
Increase in anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns	96.8%
Reduced ability to go to ceremony	93.9%
Reduced ability to participate in healthy ways to manage stress	93.9%
<b>Clinics and Organizations</b>	
Seeing patients in the clinic	96.8%
Increased difficulty providing transportation to patients/clients	87.1%
Home visiting for pregnant women and new parents	86.7%

\*Denominator used to calculate percentage does not include “I don’t know” answers

