

*We are  
public health.*



Inset photo of H1N1 immunization drive through clinic.  
Photo courtesy of Del Ostenberg, Colville Indian Reservation.

**We work to prevent  
public health emergencies.**

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**Northwest Center for  
Public Health Practice**

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In the past, tribal populations in the Northwest were devastated by pandemics. To ensure that this loss of life does not happen again, Northwest tribes have formed important partnerships so that they will be ready to protect their communities from public health threats.

In 2004, leaders of eight Washington tribes created a consortium to effectively respond to the public health emergencies facing their communities. This consortium of tribes has since gained formal 501c3 status and is called the [Northwest Tribal Emergency Management Council](#) (NWTEMC). Membership in NWTEMC has grown to include the majority of the federally-recognized tribes in Washington State. Tribes from Alaska, Oregon, and Idaho have also joined the council.

During the H1N1 crisis of 2009, many tribes played a leading role in making sure that their communities were vaccinated against H1N1. One tribal community that was ready for H1N1 was the [Colville Indian Reservation](#) located in eastern Washington. Reservation leaders coordinated a team that included the tribal departments of Corrections, Fire and Rescue, Health, Police, Natural Resources Enforcement, and Risk Management. Other partners included Indian Health Services, Bureau of Indian Affairs, the American Red Cross, and Okanogan County Emergency Management.

This team organized a successful drive-through immunization clinic. Commenting on this experience and other public health preparedness activities, Del Ostenberg, Safety Officer for the Colville Indian Reservation, says, "We hold our sovereignty close but at the same time want to work well with our neighboring counties. We also want to have good working relationships with state and federal governments."

About the work of NWTEMC, Ostenberg says, "Creating good working relationships before an incident happens ensures that during an emergency the best work for the people can be done. These relationships are what NWTEMC and National Tribal Emergency Management Council (NTEMC) work to promote." (In addition to his work on the Colville Indian Reservation, Ostenberg serves as Vice Chair on the NWTEMC and NTEMC Board of Directors.)

John Erickson, Special Assistant for the [Washington State Department of Health's Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response](#), agrees that strong partnerships are critical to effective public health emergency response in the Northwest. "The collaborative spirit that everyone comes to the table with is extremely valuable. It allows a wide range of federal, state, and tribal organizations to respond quickly to any kind of public health emergency."

NWTEMC provides technical assistance to tribes in navigating the unique relationships that come into play when sovereign tribes partner with state, local, or federal governments. These partnerships are considered government-to-government relationships and the right of tribes to direct their own responses to public health emergencies is acknowledged and respected.

To develop the infrastructure and capacity they need to keep their communities healthy, NWTEMC encourages tribes to be part of the Tribal Medical Reserve Corps. This program is part of the national [Medical Reserve Corps](#) program started in 2002 in response to the events of September 2001.

Looking to the future of tribal public health preparedness both regionally and nationally, Lynda Zambrano, Executive Director of NWTEMC says, "There is a brighter future in public health preparedness for the entire nation as we continue to develop relationships at the tribal, local, state, and federal levels that recognize the rich history, cultures, and customs of our individual tribal nations, while respecting sovereignty and all that our tribes have to offer in this process."