



TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION UNIFIED COMMAND

JIS Interview: Rosemary Lopez

The Unified Command Joint Information System team sat down with Mrs. Rosemary Lopez to get her thoughts on COVID-19 and what it means for the O'odham. Below is just a little of what Mrs. Lopez had to say.

How long have you worked in Health Care?... "It'll be 31 years, 32 in July. When I got out of nursing school, my goal was to come back to the Nation, which I did, took my nurses training, and came back. In probably 67, '66.

We used to have a lot of hepatitis breakouts in the schools before they had, immunization injections, and so, with all the schools in San Simon and here in Sells, we'd have to go around to provide education to the kids and to the communities on hand washing. Hand washing has always been encouraged, not only with us, with the community health workers, but also with the hospital. And also about coughing and covering your cough. So, this is something that's been happening and now that it's here with COVID 19, it's kind of more intense. Now I'm hoping that all the education that's been done in the past is still with the community members. We never talked about masks, and I think that's one of the things that was a disadvantage to us because the O'odham here weren't privy to the masks, maybe some were, but I would say the majority of O'odham didn't have masks, and had never wore masks. So that's quite an adjustment for the elders and, well, just the communities in general. I think that's the only part that we will probably need more community education in. Oh, and that they understand covering your mouth when you're coughing. I've been taught that when there's a sneeze, it actually travels 15 feet if they don't cover their mouths. So, I feel that maybe all that education in the past with all of the infections, will hopefully help the people adjust [and] continue to wash their hands and cover their nose. The only thing is now adjusting to the mask.

You know, a lot of us really don't know our history or history of any kind. I really feel like we should have a scientific group of people that are going to keep track of [this]. "Ok, this happened this time. What's going to be the next one?" We can never let our guard down, [and] think it's not going to happen again. I think it is going to continue throughout the years, it starts on the outside (off Nation) [and] eventually reaches [us]. I'm saying that because, they talk about that epidemic that happened in 1917/18 (Spanish Flu). I have a personal history to that because my grandfather was in WWI. He came home and that's when they were having that flu epidemic, [it] killed a lot of our O'odham. He buried a lot of our O'odham and then he got it himself, he died from that flu.



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We have Dr. Villar now, we have those people that are there in the Unified Command. But they're going to be gone, we're all not here forever. So, we should be bringing up new people to work in that field. I'm glad that Cyndi Manuel is a PHN, she got her nursing degree and her master's degree in nursing. We need to encourage education in this area to our younger people.

So I think that we should always keep that in mind and prepare. Be prepared. That's my thought for the future."

