



Coronavirus Relief

Dear Dr. Per Cap:

The coronavirus feels like our worst nightmare come true. I've been ordered to work remotely, schools are closed, sports are on hold, and stores are sold out of essential goods. My husband is a truck driver and I really wish he would take time off until things settle down. He says we can't afford that and because the elderly are most at risk, he's not worried about getting sick. How can a family prepare for this financially?

Signed, Freaking Out

Dear Freaking

The coronavirus is currently creating more disruption in everyone's life than anything I've seen in quite a while, maybe ever. Every generation lives to experience a major crisis and for millennials the coronavirus appears to be that crisis. I know it's really scary right now but I'm confident we'll get through this.

I also understand your husband's decision to keep working, but keep close tabs on the situation. If you need to step in remind him that nobody wins points for being the tough guy or gal with a "show must go on" attitude at a time like this. There's no prize for sacking up if it puts others at risk. According to experts your husband is right about the elderly or those with compromised immune systems being most vulnerable. But unfortunately he and many other people are missing what by now should be a very obvious point – he could be a COVID-19 carrier who makes others sick. In fact four out of five people who contract COVID-19 are infected by someone who doesn't even know they've been infected themselves.

It looks like coronavirus is going to lock down Indian Country along with the rest of the U.S. until at least late April. Many people are losing hours at work or will be laid off. I hear different estimates about how many people will get sick so I won't even speculate. Hopefully we won't see major food shortages and pundits warn that hoarding isn't necessary and only incites panic. However, let's also be real. If stores can't stock their shelves or many of us must quarantine – life's going to get even tougher.

So please work on a plan for how your family will get through the next few weeks or months. For starters take an inventory of your kitchen cupboards and plan sensible meals that will go a long way.

Think soups, stews, pasta, and rice dishes. Now might be a good time to break out that bag of Native wild rice your friend from Leech Lake sent you for Christmas.

Also try to avoid unnecessary purchases or major financial commitments. So hold off on that new car loan and steer clear of the Amazon deals that come up on your feed - especially \$400 rolls of toilet paper!

Hopefully you have an emergency fund to get you through at least a few months of lost wages. If so, budget that money for necessities. But if you don't and credit challenges make borrowing difficult you might have to make some tough decisions.

In the meantime a federal economic stimulus package will hopefully be approved very soon. Legislators are negotiating terms but in addition to billions of dollars in loan guarantees for corporations and small businesses here is what has been proposed for regular folks like you and me. Please note this information is current as of Friday, March 20th but can change quickly.

- Direct payments to Americans in the amount of \$1,200 or \$2,400 for married couples plus an additional \$500 per child. Checks will be reduced for individuals who make more than \$75,000 and couples earning more than \$150,000.
- Individuals who paid no taxes in 2018 are eligible to receive \$600 if they have \$2,500 in qualifying income.
- Deadline for filing 2019 tax returns extended to July 15th with additional extensions for some tax payments.
- Deferment of student loan payments with no penalties for 90 days.

Currently there is no official word on forbearance of mortgage and rent payments, suspension of interest on personal loans and credit cards, or waiver of penalties on early withdrawals from 401k's or other types of retirement accounts.

I'm also not sure how far direct payments will go in many Native households so it's good to know many cell phone providers and local utilities are suspending disconnections for non-payments. Hopefully tribal governments will also be able to provide additional financial support to tribal members but of course there are no guarantees.

Let's all pray this crisis will be over soon. But until then get your ducks and your bucks in order.

Ask Dr. Per Cap is a program funded by First Nations Development Institute with assistance from the FINRA Investor Education Foundation. For more information, visit www.firstnations.org. To send a question to Dr. Per Cap, email askdrpercap@firstnations.org.