



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

## POLICY RESEARCH CENTER

April 24, 2021



### Research Policy Update

#### ***COVID-19 Data – Situation Summary – Percent Positive Tests***

The purpose of this update is to share publicly available data and trends related to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Indian Country. The NCAI Policy Research Center reviews updates on public websites in the early morning each day and records available data. The data in this update represents what has been shared publicly by the sources described below, and the NCAI Policy Research Center is not analyzing the primary sources of data. This update represents data posted at the time of viewing each day.

In reviewing this data, it is important to understand that current COVID-19 data is likely an underestimate of the actual data due to current lack of adequate testing availability, underreporting of tribal and urban Indian health program data to the Indian Health Service (IHS), and underreporting of race/ethnicity data to states and the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Tribal nations are encouraged to conduct their own surveillance locally in partnership with local, county, state, and federal agencies.

#### **IHS DATA - COVID-19 PERCENT POSITIVE TESTS**

The primary public source of federal data on COVID-19 cases in American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) is the IHS Coronavirus (COVID-19) website located at the following link: <https://www.ihs.gov/coronavirus/>. On this website, total COVID-19 positive tests are recorded daily as well as the total tested for the overall IHS and each IHS Area.

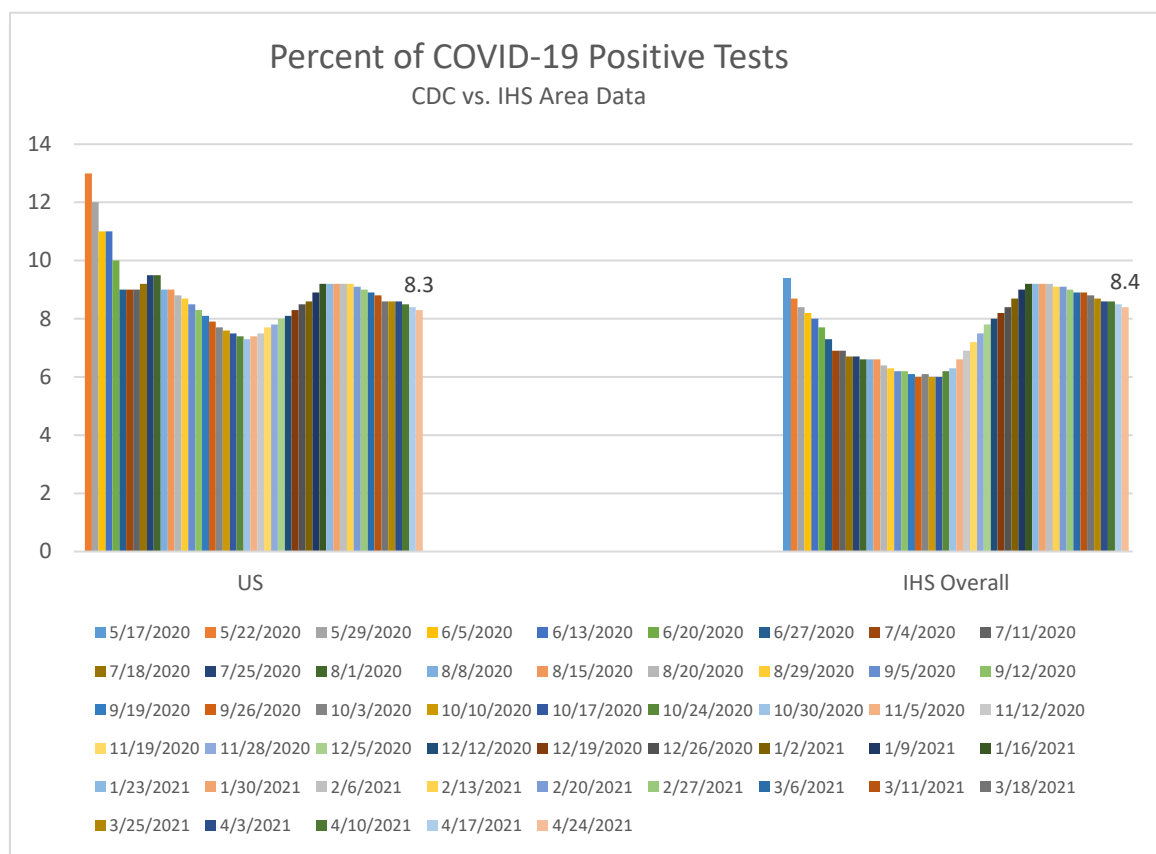
The NCAI Policy Research Center tracked these case numbers daily since March 23, 2020. Starting on May 17, 2020, we calculated the percent positive tests from IHS COVID-19 data posted on the IHS website each week by dividing the cumulative total of COVID-19 positive tests reported that day with the total tests reported on the website, and monitored the trends over time. Multiple factors may impact the percent of positive tests, including availability of testing, criteria for access to the test, the type of test used and the quality of the testing, and the underlying infection rate. Many officials and news media outlets often comment on the percent positive test results for states, and IHS occasionally comments on their overall percent positive test results. Percent positive test results are an additional piece of data to consider,

but they should be interpreted with caution and in the context of other data and information. If all conditions related to testing stayed constant, trends over time could be a useful indicator for public health efforts and decisions about reopening stages.

#### *Percent Positive Tests – COVID-19 – IHS Data*

**Figure 1** shows the percent positive test results for the overall U.S. from CDC data and for the totals from the IHS data each week from May 17, 2020 to present.

**Figure 1. COVID-19 Percent Positive Tests – Overall Results for CDC and IHS**



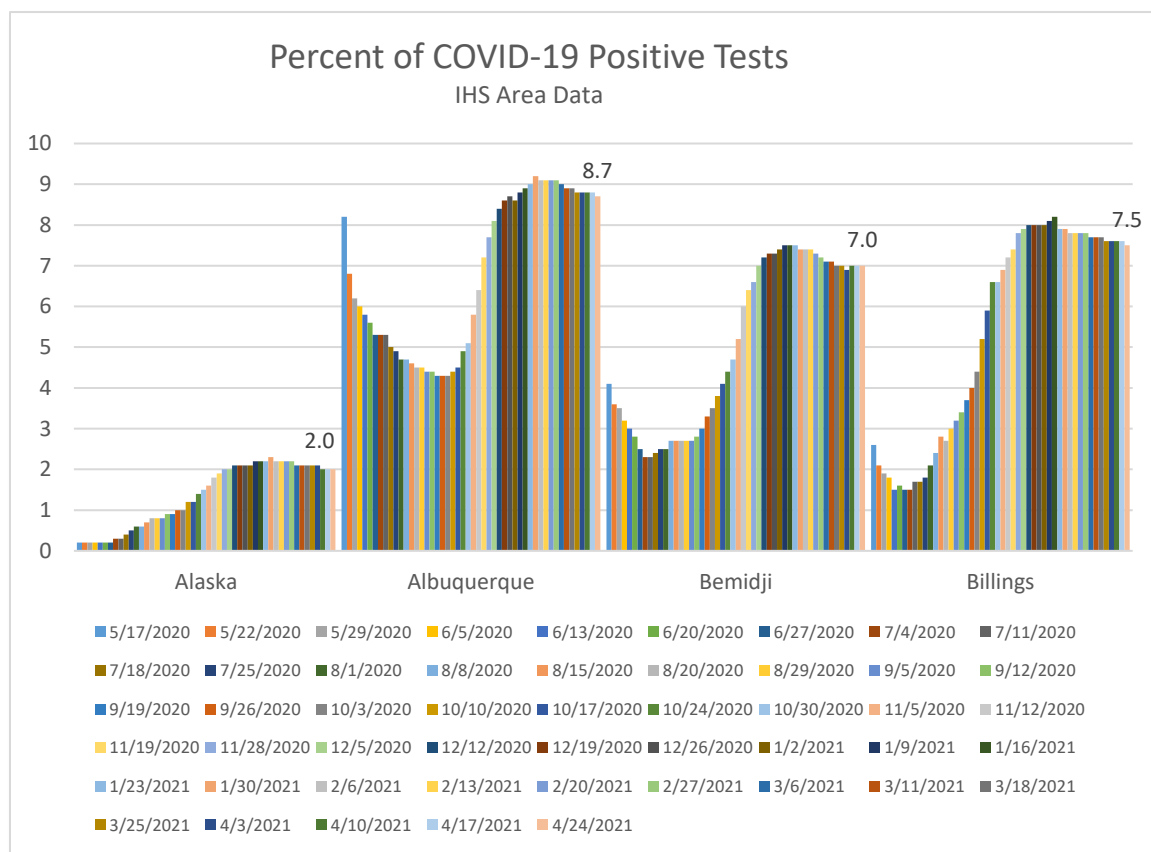
The website for CDC testing data is at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/testing-in-us.html> and the IHS data is from the IHS Coronavirus webpage at <https://www.ihs.gov/coronavirus/?CFID=178360658&CFTOKEN=22834596>.

The national percent positive test result from CDC and IHS are both over 5.0 percent. The CDC and IHS percent positive test results are now about the same, and the trends for both appear to be decreasing.

On 10/16/2020, IHS began reporting cumulative percent positive test results that are a slightly different than our results due to the method used to calculate the results. While our results are calculated as number of positive tests divided by total tests, the IHS calculates their result as the number of positive tests divided by the total of both positive and negative tests. The CDC describes several ways to calculate percent positive tests, but consistency in calculation is important when monitoring trends. Therefore, we will monitor the IHS results, but will continue to calculate our results in this report the same for consistency in monitoring trends.

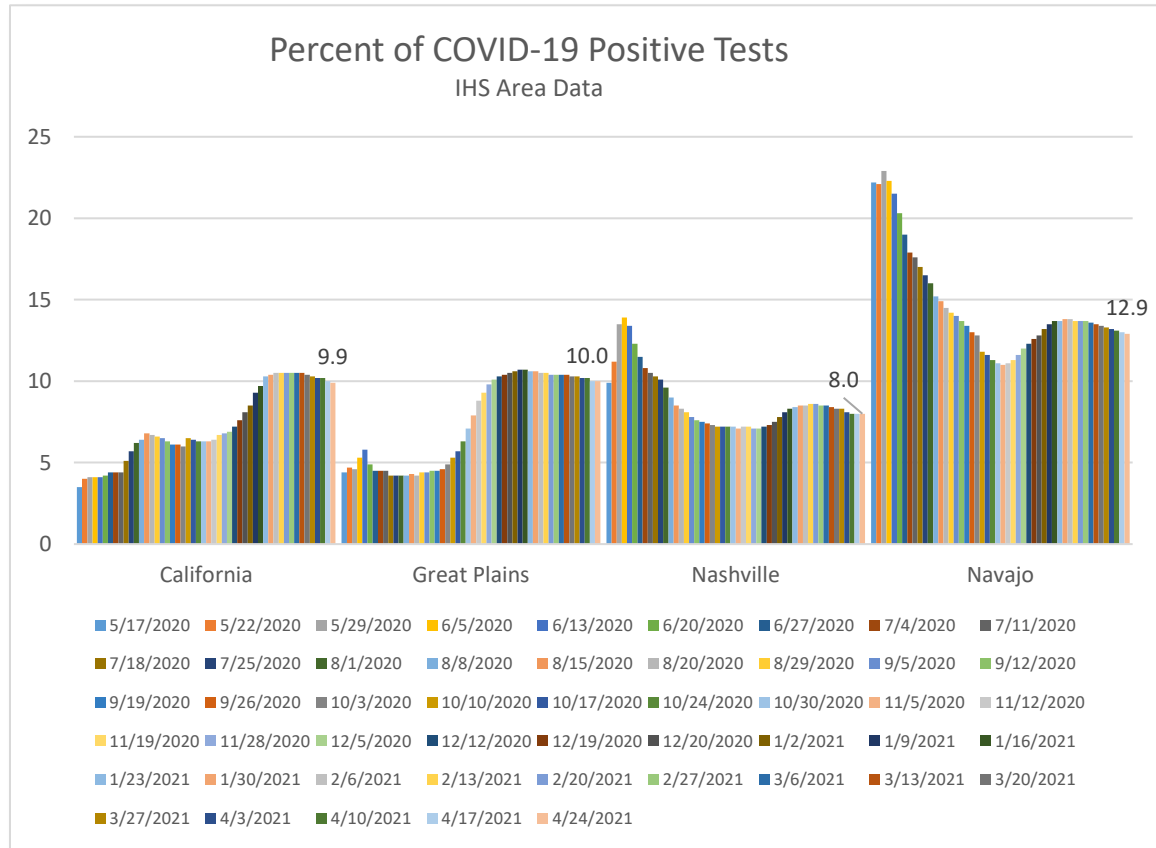
**Figures 2-4** show the percent positive COVID-19 test result for each IHS Area based on data from the IHS coronavirus website each week from May 17, 2020 to present. Four IHS Areas are shown on each figure in alphabetical order. Overall, the majority of IHS Areas have percent positive test results above 5.0 percent. For each graph, only the latest result is labeled.

**Figure 2. COVID-19 Percent Positive Tests – Alaska, Albuquerque, Bemidji, Billings IHS Areas**



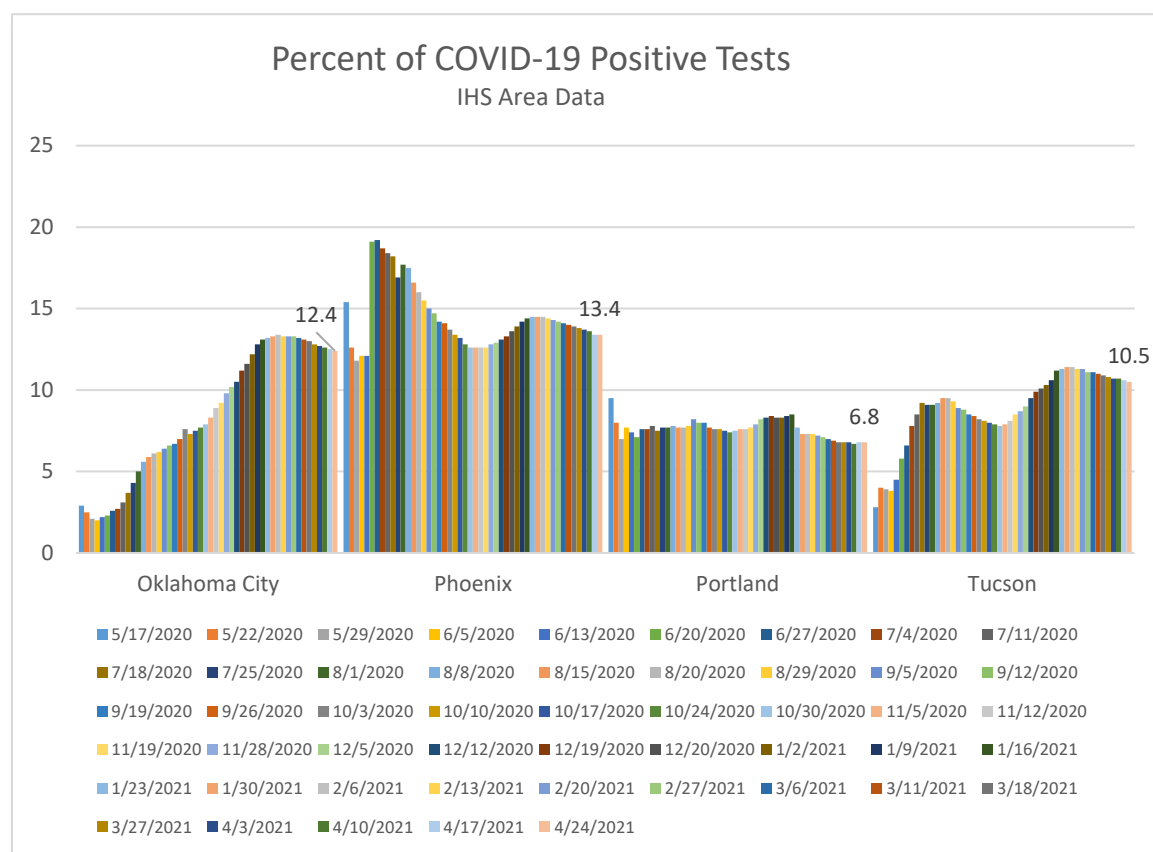
Of the four IHS Areas illustrated in **Figure 2**, only one has a percent positive test results below 5.0 percent, and all four IHS Areas appear to be the same or decreased compared to last week.

**Figure 3. COVID-19 Percent Positive Tests – California, Great Plains, Nashville, Navajo IHS Areas**



In **Figure 3**, all four IHS Areas shown have percent positive test results above 5.0 percent and all four IHS Area results appear to be the same or decreased compared to last week.

**Figure 4. COVID-19 Percent Positive Tests – Oklahoma City, Phoenix, Portland, Tucson IHS Areas**



In **Figure 4**, all four IHS Areas have percent positive test results above 5.0 percent, and all IHS Area results are the same or decreased compared to prior weeks.

While some believe that increases in COVID-19 cases are simply due to increased COVID-19 testing, the White House Coronavirus Task Force indicated that an increase in cases AND an increase in percent positive tests means that the increase is likely a true increase. The U.S. and World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines recommend a percent positive COVID-19 test result below 5.0 percent should be achieved before advancing to the next reopening stage. Percent positive test results greater than 10 percent are concerning, even if decreasing, since the result means that at least 1 in 10 tests performed or more are positive.

The NCAI Policy Research Center publishes the percent positive test results for each IHS Area along with trends in COVID-19 case data in its other report, *NCAI COVID-19 Data Situation Summary IHS Area Data*, which is published weekly on the NCAI COVID-19 website listed below under the “Other Resources” section. Percent positive test results should be interpreted

in the context of COVID-19 case trends and local public health efforts. Tribal nations are encouraged to track their own data in consultation with local, state, and federal partners.

## Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Coronavirus (COVID-19) website:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Indian Health Service (IHS) Coronavirus (COVID-19) website:  
<https://www.ihs.gov/coronavirus/>

Tribal Epidemiology Centers:  
<https://tribalepicenters.org/>

National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) COVID-19 website:  
<http://www.ncai.org/covid-19>

NCAI COVID-19 Situation Summary documents:  
<http://www.ncai.org/Covid-19/resources-for-indian-country/other-resources>

**Citation:** NCAI Policy Research Center (2021). *Research Policy Update: COVID-19 Data – Situation Summary – Percent Positive Tests*. Washington DC: National Congress of American Indians, April 24, 2021.

**Questions:** NCAI Policy Research Center – email: [research@ncai.org](mailto:research@ncai.org); website: <http://www.ncai.org/prc>