

Press Release

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North Slope resident tests positive for COVID-19

August 13, 2020 - Utqiagvik, Alaska: ASNA was notified that an individual who resides in a North Slope community tested positive for COVID-19 in Anchorage. This individual was not seen or tested at SSMH. We were informed by the North Slope Borough Public Health Nursing, that this North Slope resident remains in Anchorage. The specific community of residence is not being released at this time to protect the privacy of the resident. This is the twentieth (20) North Slope resident to test positive for COVID-19.

While the individual has been out of the region for several weeks, per State of Alaska reporting protocols, the positive case will be counted as a North Slope case. The individual is currently self-isolating in Anchorage. Therefore, follow-up testing is being managed in Anchorage and the Alaska Section of Epidemiology will work collaboratively with North Slope Borough Public Health Nursing for contact tracing.

Currently, there are three active cases in the Arctic Slope region; with cumulative 20 cases total to date for the North Slope Borough.

The North Slope Borough Department of Public Health and the State of Alaska Section of Epidemiology contact tracing teams have reached out to the individual's close contacts who may have been exposed and provided additional information on appropriate precautions. SSMH is committed to providing COVID-19 testing for anyone in the community who believes they may have been exposed, and encourages the community to continue practicing precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the disease.

Testing is available at the airport for each in-bound Alaska Airlines flight, as well as drive-thru availability at the hospital Monday – Friday from 8am until 7pm. The tests are available with no out-of-pocket costs, and may be repeated every seven (7) days.

SSMH activated its incident command structure on March 16 to manage the COVID-19 pandemic in the region. SSMH is also working with the North Slope Borough

Emergency Operations Center, North Slope Borough Health Department, and is communicating daily with regional community leaders.

This situation further emphasizes the importance of following recommendations of social distancing and safe hygiene practices. SSMH strongly encourages residents to limit the amount of non-essential activities and day-to-day social interactions. Additionally, anyone who must leave their home, is encouraged to wear a face mask in public.

SSMH has recommendations for its regional patients experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. The following symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure:

- Cough
- Fever
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- New-onset diarrhea
- Loss of smell or taste

If you are experiencing symptoms please contact the SSMH COVID-19 Hotline at 1-833-852-4622 with any questions. If you live in Utqiagvik, you may be able to use the Drive-thru testing option. If you are in a village, please contact your local clinic to arrange testing and notify clinic staff before your arrival. Testing is open to any individual requesting it, regardless of symptoms or travel history.

Please continue to follow the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations for protecting yourself against COVID-19 by practicing social distancing and washing your hands frequently. More information on protecting yourself can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>

For additional precautionary information on travel safety guidelines, please follow the attached link from Alaska Airlines at <https://www.alaskaair.com/content/advisories/coronavirus>

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