

Press Release

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Utqiagvik sees four cases determined to be caused by community spread of the virus

August 18, 2020 - Utqiagvik, Alaska: (New cases) Two (2) unrelated residents of Utqiagvik have tested positive for COVID-19. One of the individuals recently returned from off-slope travels, and was tested in Anchorage prior to returning to Utqiagvik. The second new case today is a result of community spread and was tested at Samuel Simmonds Memorial Hospital (SSMH). Both individuals have been instructed to self-isolate and quarantine at their homes in Utqiagvik.

“In light of these cases, it is very important that residents take precautions to prevent transmission of the virus,” said SSMH Chief Medical Officer Dr. Alanna Small. “Please wear a facemask every time you are in contact with people outside of your household. Also, if you are exposed to someone with the COVID-19, please self-isolate for 14 days. Even when a person is tested with a rapid or PCR test, a negative result does not stop a person’s responsibility to quarantine.” There are now four (4) cases in Utqiagvik that are determined to be caused by community spread. These four (4) community spread cases did not travel outside of the community and all tested at SSMH. At this time, there appears to be no identified association with one another.

Samuel Simmonds Memorial Hospital and the North Slope Borough Health Department are in contact with the individuals, and will continue to provide monitoring. The North Slope Borough contact tracing team will continue to reach out to individuals who may have been exposed and will provide additional information on appropriate precautions. *The medical team at SSMH strongly recommends that residents participate in COVID-19 testing especially if experiencing symptoms. Individuals experiencing symptoms should call SSMH COVID hotline at 1-833-852-4622. Other recommendations to prevent the spread include: stay 6 feet apart from other people, limit social contact, wear a facemask in public, and wash hands frequently.*

Currently, there are eight (8) active cases in the Arctic Slope region; with cumulative 26 cases total to date for the North Slope Borough.

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 recommends 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 facemask 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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