

Press Release

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North Slope residents test positive for COVID-19

August 19, 2020 - Utqiagvik, Alaska: (New cases) Two (2) unrelated individuals from the North Slope region have tested positive for COVID-19. One individual is an Utqiagvik resident, the other is a resident of a North Slope community outside of the Arctic Slope Native Association (ASNA) service area. The resident of Utqiagvik tested at Samuel Simmonds Memorial Hospital (SSMH), and upon investigation, appears to be a result of community spread. The individual is now self-isolating.

ASNA was informed that the individual who is a resident of a North Slope community outside the ASNA service area has not lived on the North Slope community for several months.

There are cumulative five (5) cases in Utqiagvik that have been determined to be caused by community spread. These five (5) 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.

(Recovered case) Additionally, two (2) previously active cases in the Arctic Slope region are now considered recovered based on the State of Alaska and CDC guidelines.

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 seven (7) active cases in the Arctic Slope region; with cumulative 28 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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