

Press Release

Contact: Tim Rowe, Public Information Officer

Phone: 907.852.9264

Email: timothy.rowe@arcticslope.org

Four North Slope residents test positive for COVID-19

August 26, 2020 - Utqiagvik, Alaska: (New cases) Four (4) unrelated residents of Utqiagvik have tested positive for COVID-19. One of the individuals tested off-slope and has not returned to the North Slope since obtaining the positive test. The other three individuals tested upon return from off-slope travels. All four cases appear to have contracted the COVID-19 virus during travels away from the North Slope. The individuals are self-isolating in Utqiagvik at this time.

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.*

(Recovered cases) Additionally, three (3) previously active cases in the Arctic Slope region are now considered recovered based on the State of Alaska and CDC guidelines.

Currently, there are nine (9) active cases in the Arctic Slope region; with cumulative 36 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. Please be aware that several North Slope communities have recently implemented travel restrictions. If you need testing prior to traveling, please contact the SSMH COVID-19 Hotline at 1-833-852-4622.

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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