

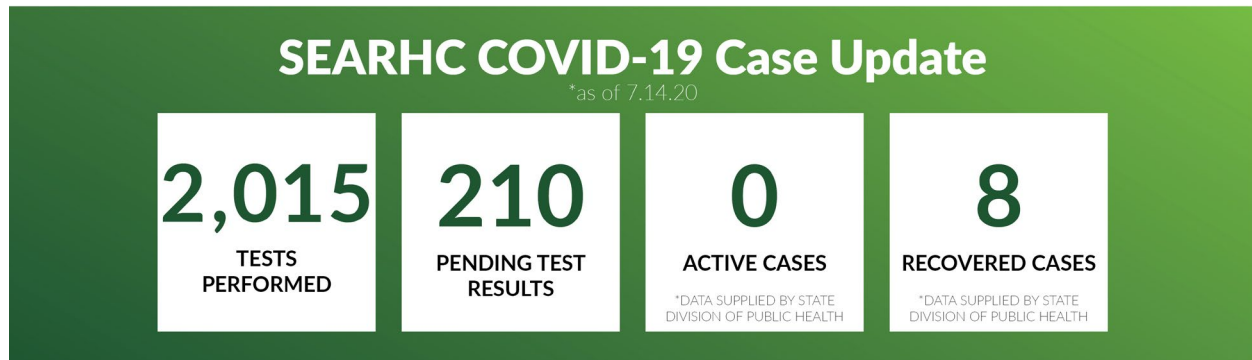
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Media Contact

Maegan Bosak, SEARHC Marketing Director, maeganb@searhc.org, 907.966.8942

Kim Lane, Borough Clerk, clerk@wrangell.com, 907.874.2381



Unified Command Talks Community Testing, Contact Tracing, School Reopen

WRANGELL, July 14, 2020 – Testing initiatives, contact tracing, and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) involvement in the school districts reopening were discussed at the latest meeting of the Wrangell Unified Command. SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium’s (SEARHC) expanded testing was a significant focus of the Wednesday, July 8, weekly conference call.

Free, asymptomatic testing was introduced in Wrangell on July 11 and 12. Sixty-four residents took advantage of the program during the initial offering. Asymptomatic testing was made possible by an Indian Health Services (IHS) grant awarded to SEARHC and available at the AICS Clinic alternate site on weekends.

“Staff have worked hard to offer community-wide, asymptomatic testing in Wrangell,” said AICS Clinic Manager Carly Allen. “Tests will be available every weekend for the remainder of the year and is a great opportunity for small business owners to encourage free employee testing.”

While Wrangell Medical Center staff continue to assist with the State airport testing program, this week, WMC added harbor testing to their weekly offerings. According to Project Manager Alicia Gillen, free COVID swabbing will be available to marine travelers arriving from out-of-state at Heritage Harbor. A van will be set up at the north end of the Heritage parking lot, closest to Sea Level Seafoods, every Tuesday and Thursday from 10:15 a.m. – 12 p.m. with no appointment necessary. Contact agillen@searhc.org for more information.

Testing continues to be available during the week for all residents experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 - fever, aching, cough and shortness of breath, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache,



sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell. Contact the SEARHC COVID-19 Hotline at 907.966.8799 for more information.

Public Health Nurse Erin Michael discussed the Office of Public Health being overwhelmed due to a drastic increase of contact tracing related to the spike of statewide cases. Public Health has moved to a more centralized system for callbacks, meaning Michael will be conducting interviews for confirmed cases throughout the state, not just the Wrangell-Petersburg area. Ideally, Michael says she will make the calls for her designated communities, but those calls could be directed to a pool of interviewers. According to Michael, the State continues to onboard new staff daily to keep pace with necessary contact tracing.

EOC Director Dorianne Sprehe said that the EOC's next task was to tackle the opening of schools. Discussions have taken place with Wrangell Public School District Superintendent Debbe Lancaster and Maintenance Director Josh Blatchley to bring the EOC up-to-speed on the district's Smart Start plan, which is being constructed through framework guidance provided by the Alaska Department of Early Education & Development. Superintendent Lancaster has been invited to participate in EOC meetings and will work with her staff to compile a list of needs prior to reopening.

For information on the local pandemic response, visit wrangellcovid19.org or covid19.searhc.org.

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