

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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SEARHC COVID-19 Case Update

*as of 8.11.20

3,418

TESTS
PERFORMED

53

PENDING TEST
RESULTS

1

ACTIVE CASES

*DATA SUPPLIED BY STATE
DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

14

RECOVERED CASES

*DATA SUPPLIED BY STATE
DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Wrangell Command Talk Masks, Tests, Patient Support

WRANGELL, August 11, 2020 - Local masking guidance, testing, and patient support were discussed during the Wednesday, August 5, meeting of the Wrangell Unified Command. Representatives from the City and Borough of Wrangell (CBW), SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC), the local Emergency Operations Center (EOC), and the office of Public Health consolidated the latest COVID-19 information via Zoom.

Mayor Steve Prysunka complimented EOC staff members Captain Dorianne Sprehe and Jamie Roberts for their presentation during the August 4 CBW Assembly special meeting to discuss a potential local face covering mandate. Prysunka mentioned that, ultimately, the Assembly decided to place a resolution encouraging mask wearing on the August 11 regular meeting agenda. This week, the Borough implemented mandatory masking for all CBW staff.

"We had previously required masks in all of our forward-facing offices," said Prysunka. "It's important that we create a unified front, demonstrating our own compliance. Masking is the one thing everyone can do to help slow the spread, and it's so easy."

SEARHC Vice President and Wrangell Medical Center (WMC) Hospital Administrator Leatha Mercurieff announced that a pair of ventilators ordered in February have been shipped and are due to arrive in the next two weeks. Additionally, Mercurieff recognized an increase in hospital traffic due to recent COVID-19 cases.

"WMC has increased the number of nursing staff to meet demand, and the ongoing Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training program should produce four new staff in mid-November," said Mercurieff. "Blake Forrester (Chief Nursing Officer) and Hunter Gaylord (Infection Control and Prevention Nurse) have done an excellent job making sure we have the staff we need to care for all patients."



SEARHC staff are preparing for changes to the state traveler testing program to comply with new guidelines, which were introduced on August 11. The updated mandate states that non-resident travelers may no longer obtain a free COVID-19 test upon arrival in Alaska, preserving the state supply. Non-residents must now take a qualifying test 72-hours before departure to Alaska and show proof of a negative result at arrival, or quarantine until results are received and submitted. Non-compliance will lead to a required test at the airport, and a \$250 payment at the traveler's expense. Free tests will remain available to all Alaska residents traveling into the state.

AICS Clinic Manager Carly Allen stressed the importance of community COVID-19 testing in the wake of recent local gatherings. Free, asymptomatic tests are available to all residents every Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. outside the AICS Clinic.

Dr. Lynn Prysunka, WMC Medical Director, applauded the introduction of the local support group Wrangell Quarantines. The Facebook-based group maintains participant privacy while offering care packages, errand running, phone or Facetime calls, and more to persons in isolation due to COVID-19.

"This is something we've been hoping to implement locally," said Jamie Roberts. "It's important for those in quarantine to know they are heroes within the community and not being shunned. We need to change the mindset, and this group is a step in the right direction."

Lastly, Wrangell Cooperative Association (WCA) Tribal Administrator Esther Reese updated the Unified Command on the funding of power cot equipment from WCA on behalf of the local ambulance fleet. Mayor Prysunka stressed the importance of the new equipment, which will allow all three ambulances to operate safely with smaller response crews. Patient loading and unloading can be accomplished with one responder, compared to three or four with manual loading systems, limiting close contact and preserving usage of personal protective equipment. Reese said that the Tribe was "happy to be a part of the solution."

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

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