COVID-19 HEALTH ALERT

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Health Alert 012 – Recommendations for Keeping Alaskans Safe

COVID-19 poses a risk to all Alaskans. Containing the virus that causes COVID-19 cannot be done through community measures alone; Alaskans must take individual responsibility to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their community. The primary ways to do this are:

- Wearing a cloth face covering/mask when in public settings and when you are around people outside your household
- Practicing social distancing by avoiding close contact and minimizing time spent indoors with persons outside your household
- Monitoring your health and staying at home when sick
- Practicing good hygiene by frequently washing your hands and disinfecting high-touch surfaces in your home and workplace

When we reduce the spread of the virus by taking these individual measures, we reduce the need for government intervention.

Wear a cloth face covering/mask

Wearing a cloth face covering is strongly recommended for all Alaskans 2 years of age and older, other than those with breathing problems and those who cannot remove the covering without assistance. **Face coverings protect those around you and also offer you some protection.**

- Wear a cloth face covering in public settings and when around people other than your household members

- Make sure the face covering is made with at least two layers of fabric and covers both the nose and mouth
- When removing the face covering, avoid touching the front of the face covering (because it may be contaminated); remove it by grasping the ear loops, ties, or bands and immediately discard or place in a designated container for laundering
- *Wash your hands immediately* after removing the face covering and before touching anything else
- Wash cloth face coverings in hot, soapy water between every use
- Be careful to avoid developing a false sense of security when using face coverings; continue to follow social distancing measures, including maintaining at least six feet between yourself and others, staying at home as much as possible, and washing your hands frequently

Practice Social Distancing

- Avoid close contact with people who are not in your household
  - Put at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) of distance between yourself and people who don't live in your household
  - Remember that people infected with the virus but who do not have any symptoms can also spread the virus
  - Keeping distance from others is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick
- Minimize time indoors with individuals outside your household even if you can maintain a distance of 6 feet
- Avoid all gatherings, even small ones, with persons who are not in your household

Monitor your health and stay home if you are sick

- Be alert for symptoms. Watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath, muscle and body aches, new loss of taste or smell, and other symptoms of COVID-19
  - This is especially important if you are running essential errands, or going into the workplace or a setting where it may be difficult to keep a physical distance of 6 feet
  - Take your temperature if symptoms develop
- **If you develop symptoms, stay home – even if symptoms are only mild**
  - If possible, maintain 6 feet between the person who is sick and other household members
    - Consider providing additional protections or more intensive care for household members over 65 years old or with underlying health conditions
- Get tested as soon as symptoms start if you can and stay away from others until your test results are back

Practice good hygiene

- Wash your hands often
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Disinfect surfaces like doorknobs, tables, desks, and handrails regularly
- Increase ventilation by opening windows when able
- Stop handshaking – use other noncontact methods of greeting each other

Additional information

If you test positive

- If you test positive, you need to isolate away from others to keep them safe. "Isolate" is the term used in association with individuals who are sick with or have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19. Isolation means staying home all the time and keeping away from household members as much as possible. More information is available here and here.
- For most people with no or mild symptoms that are improving, isolation will be for 10 days since your symptoms start, or if you never have any symptoms, 10 days since you had your test. Consult with a healthcare provider or public health staff member if you have questions about how long you need to be in isolation.
- You **do not** need to have a negative test to be cleared from isolation.
- It is very important for people who test positive to notify anyone they may have had contact with while infectious. Information on what counts as a "contact" can be found here.
- If you test positive and are unable to isolate safely or need resources during your isolation period, contact your local public center.

If you have had close contact with a confirmed case

If you have close contact with a confirmed case, you need to quarantine to keep others safe. "Quarantine" is the term used in association with individuals who have been exposed to someone with the virus that causes COVID-19. Quarantine means staying home all the time and keeping away from household members as much as possible. Information on when and how to quarantine is available here and here.

- The preferred quarantine period is currently 14 days from the last exposure to a known case but may be able to be shorter under certain circumstances for contacts who do not develop symptoms. The State of Alaska's guidance is available here. Briefly, those two options apply as follows:
  - 7-day quarantine with a molecular or antigen test <48 hours before the end of quarantine; Individuals must remain in quarantine until their test results are available
  - 10-day quarantine
- There is some risk of post-quarantine transmission associated with discontinuing quarantine before 14 days. Individuals should continue to monitor themselves for symptoms for a full 14 days after their last contact with a confirmed case.
- If you are unable to quarantine safely or need resources during your quarantine period, contact your local public center.

Testing guidance

- Anybody with symptoms of COVID-19 should be tested
  - A positive test within 90 days of someone's first infection can be difficult to interpret and needs to be discussed with a medical professional.
- Some people without symptoms should also be tested including:
  - People who need to be tested under a State Health Order or as required by their local community or medical center
  - All close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 patients
  - Health care workers in hospitals and congregate living settings
  - Residents in congregate living settings (see DHSS guidance for specific groups) and other high-consequence settings (e.g., people coming into remote communities from areas where COVID-19 is circulating)
  - People involved in discrete outbreaks (in consultation with public health)
  - People who may be at increased risk for infection (discuss with medical professional)
  - People who are using a release from quarantine strategy that includes a testing requirement
  - Please note: People without symptoms who have had a positive test in the past 90 days should NOT be re-tested.
- More information can be found in the Alaska Section of Epidemiology's testing guidance

Travel considerations

- Follow State of Alaska travel requirements and CDC travel recommendations
- Assess the risks of travel including the mode of transportation and the level of spread of the virus in the location you will be visiting
- At-risk individuals and communities with limited health care infrastructure or high-risk populations should considering limiting all non-essential travel

Special considerations for workplaces, schools and childcare, correctional facilities, and other community locations and events are available at
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html and
http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/COVID-19/default.aspx

This is not a mandate.

Visit the State of Alaska's COVID-19 website at coronavirus.alaska.gov for more information