First Confirmed COVID-19 Case for Sitka

SITKA, April 25, 2020 – On Saturday, April 25, State of Alaska Public Officials announced the first confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) case in the community of Sitka. This was the 5th confirmed case within a SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) facility. There are currently 339 confirmed cases in the State of Alaska.

The confirmed patient is a resident at Sitka Long-Term Care (SLTC). The patient was immediately isolated and transferred to Mt. Edgecumbe Medical Center, and plans were implemented to ensure the safety of the other residents. An investigation is currently underway to identify the source of the virus. For the last two months, SLTC has followed rigorous guidelines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services to help keep this virus from contacting our most vulnerable population. All outside visitors are prohibited from entering the building and staff is screened at the beginning of every shift. All SLTC residents have been tested and tests have been offered to residents and staff at the Pioneer Home.

“Positive COVID-19 cases became a reality in Southeast on March 17, and with today’s announcement, they became a reality for Sitka,” said SEARHC Vice President and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Elliot Bruhl. “This confirmed case showcases the persistence of this virus, and the ability for asymptomatic people to spread it within the community. SEARHC will continue to follow the framework constructed by our Incident Command System (ICS) and implement planned precautions throughout the Consortium.”

SEARHC’s Incident Command System (ICS) has worked diligently to prepare staff and facilities throughout the region for COVID-19 patients. All visitor access has been restricted, screening is required at all facilities for both patients and staff, equipment has been inventoried and stocked, and the hospital has configured multiple areas, specifically for COVID-19 patients. ICS has requested usage of the three separate Mt. Edgecumbe High School dormitories for surge planning. Each would serve a dedicated use - hospital overflow, mild COVID-19 cases, and persons under investigation (PUI). The utilization of MEHS would allow patients from Southeast communities, particularly smaller communities without resources, to be sent to Sitka for ongoing care by SEARHC staff associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 tests are available at the alternate screening site next to the Mountainside Family Clinic. Those who meet the testing guidelines—currently fever, cough, new shortness of breath, symptoms of the common cold, new diarrhea, abnormal sense of smell/taste--regardless of travel or exposure criteria. COVID-19 testing is available by calling 907.966.8799.

Patients with chronic illnesses, or considered high-risk, should contact their provider immediately if they show symptoms. Low-risk patients are urged to self-isolate should they become sick.
Continued adherence to virus preventive practices is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control, including frequent hand washing for the recommended 20 seconds; covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue; cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects; and getting an influenza vaccination. SEARHC encourages residents to follow all local, state and federal mandates and practice social distancing. Visit covid19.searhc.org for the latest coronavirus information, or to find the provider nearest you.

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