

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Media Contact

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INCIDENT COMMAND ENSURES STAFFING IN ALL COMMUNITIES

SITKA, March 20, 2020 - The SouthEast Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) Incident Command System (ICS) met again on Tuesday, March 17, to discuss the latest coronavirus (COVID-19) developments and direct unit leaders in appropriate responses to relay to staff. With COVID-19 cases confirmed in Ketchikan this week, SEARHC has made deliberate organizational moves to protect essential services without sacrificing preparedness for the pending in-network arrival of the pandemic.

With patient and staff safety in mind, certain routine services have been suspended, patient travel has been reduced, and alternate screening sites have opened. Supplies are currently sufficient across the Consortium. Out of precaution, staff travel is limited and steps being taken to ensure appropriate staffing is available within all communities.

SEARHC staff returning from travel outside of the state of Alaska are required to self-isolate for a period of 14-days and require clinician approval prior to returning to work. Supervisors have placed heavy restrictions on PTO and non-essential travel to ensure high staffing numbers.

“Providing care to our patients and communities is our mission, and at this time of crisis, we must be prepared to do our very best,” said Dr. Elliot Bruhl, SEARHC Vice President and Chief Medical Officer. “Focusing on core and emergency services will allow for maximum preparation ahead of the virus. The ICS team has been faced with some difficult decisions due to the size and severity of the COVID-19 threat but remain confident that each step will improve our ability to provide essential and emergent care to all who need it.”

Routine optometry and dental services have been suspended, with the exception of emergency procedures. Patient travel has been suspended unless urgent or emergent conditions are present. Elective surgeries have been suspended.

Patients in Juneau, Sitka, Wrangell, Haines, and Klawock can now receive an appointment for drive-by testing, which allows patients to remain in their vehicle while being administered appropriate tests by a SEARHC clinician. These alternative sites reduce the threat of contamination in primary care and hospital facilities.

For more information on SEARHC’s coronavirus response, visit covid19.searhc.org or call the SEARHC COVID-19 Hotline at 907.966.8799.

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