

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Confirmed COVID-19 Case for Sitka

SITKA, May 25, 2020 – On Monday, May 25, State of Alaska Public Officials announced a confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) case in the community of Sitka. According to the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, there are currently 408 confirmed cases in the State of Alaska.

The confirmed patient received COVID-19 testing as part of the admitting protocol at Mt. Edgecumbe Medical Center (MEMC). Upon receiving the positive test result, the patient immediately isolated and continues to quarantine at home. The patient is currently asymptomatic. SEARHC staff are working with state public officials to complete contact tracing and notify anyone who may have come in contact with the individual. An investigation is currently underway to identify the source of the virus.

“As a community, Sitka has excelled in taking early precautions to keep the case count low allowing time to prepare staff and facilities for positive COVID-19 cases,” said SEARHC Vice President and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Elliot Bruhl. “We continue to urge Sitkans to practice good hygiene and social distance to protect our vulnerable friends and neighbors.”

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, the hospital has configured multiple areas, specifically for COVID-19 patients, and all SEARHC staff have received COVID-19 testing. ICS has an agreement for 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 symptomatic testing guidelines—including a fever, cough, 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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