

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Media Contact

Maegan Bosak, SEARHC Marketing Director, maeganb@searhc.org, 907.966.8942

Kim Lane, CBW Borough Clerk, clerk@wrangell.com, 907.874.2381

WRANGELL ORGANIZATIONS COLLABORATE IN CORONAVIRUS PREPAREDNESS

WRANGELL, March 5, 2020 – The City and Borough of Wrangell (CBW), the SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) and local leadership joined Wednesday, March 4, in the first weekly meeting to collaborate and prepare a local response to the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The team, consisting of CBW, SEARHC, Wrangell Medical Center (WMC), Wrangell Volunteer Fire Dept., Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Wrangell Police Dept. and local port officials, is closely monitoring information preparation of a potential outbreak in Southeast. While the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services states that there have been no confirmed cases in Alaska to date, the community is being proactive as confirmed COVID-19 cases swell in Washington State.

“Wrangell EMS and Emergency Dispatch have instituted protocols to screen for potential coronavirus on all calls,” said Borough Manager Lisa Von Bargaen. “The Borough is reviewing emergency management procedures and authorities related to prevention and response. We are working closely with SEARHC to ensure coordination in planning related to coronavirus risk.”

WMC and the AICS Clinic implemented COVID-19 screening protocols for all patients in early February. WMC has taken extra measures to ensure the safety of patients and Long-Term Care residents. Points of entry are being monitored, with patients in need of emergency services required to use the ER entrance, where they will be greeted by a nurse for screening. All visitors will be directed to the Nurses Station for screening prior to admittance to Acute Care or Long-Term Care. Visiting hours are limited to 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. until further notice.

“WMC has been at the forefront of a Consortium-wide proactive response to COVID-19,” said SEARHC Vice-President and WMC Hospital Administrator Leatha Mercurieff. “SEARHC and WMC will work diligently and deliberately with leadership from across the community to ensure the correct level of care is available to each and every Wrangell resident in the event of an outbreak.”

Dr. Elliot Bruhl, SEARHC Vice-President and Chief Medical Officer, shared that SEARHC providers received COVID-19 screening protocols in early February and all locations have been given direction to screen all patients meeting symptomatic requirements. COVID-19 symptoms are similar to those of the flu – fever, aching, cough, and shortness of breath.

“People can help prevent the threat by washing hands thoroughly and often; covering coughs and sneezes; cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects; and getting a flu shot to eliminate concerns, as COVID-19 symptoms are similar to those of influenza,” said Dr. Bruhl. Bruhl also explained that patients with chronic illnesses like diabetes or cancer, or immune compromise should contact their doctor immediately if they become ill, however healthy people should stay home if they become sick.

If you are concerned you might have contracted the coronavirus, don’t panic, as the flu or another respiratory virus is still the most likely cause. Contact your healthcare provider for advice. If you choose to visit an emergency department, call ahead to alert staff of your coronavirus concerns and request a mask be brought out to you prior to entering to reduce the risk of exposure. For health questions or concerns outside of normal clinic hours, patients can contact the SEARHC 24/7 Nurse Advice Line at 1.800.613.0560 to be triaged by a registered nurse.

###