

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Healthcare Providers Increase Security as Borough Declares Emergency

WRANGELL, March 19, 2020 - On Wednesday, March 18, representatives from the City and Borough of Wrangell (CBW) were joined by healthcare, first responder, and port stakeholders to consolidate information for continued local response to the coronavirus (COVID-19). Wrangell Medical Center (WMC) continues to update protocols, emergency medical service (EMS) technicians are following new guidelines, and the AICS Clinic has streamlined COVID-19 testing ahead of any positive cases being confirmed in Wrangell.

"We are screening 100 percent of traffic that passes through our single entrance at WMC," said SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) Vice President and WMC Hospital Administrator Leatha Merculieff. "A doored partition has been constructed to further isolate our long-term care residents and there is no visitation allowed at this time. We are finalizing an agreement for an alternate site for our residents, should COVID-19 cases be confirmed in Wrangell. As the safety of our patients is our number one priority, we will mobilize our residents to the alternate care site if there is at least one confirmed positive isolated in the community and a positive admitted to WMC."

As SEARHC announced the suspension of many services across the Consortium, including non-emergent dental, patient travel, and all elective surgeries, efforts have been made to streamline core services that remain open, such as primary care and hospital services. The AICS Clinic parking lot is now home to one of five alternative testing sites in the SEARHC Care Network, allowing patients to make appointments for "drive-by" testing that can be administered in their vehicles, reducing risk of potential contamination of facilities. Patients meeting the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) screening guidelines will be given an influenza test, and if negative, a COVID-19 specimen will be taken for testing.

EMS techs have implemented a screening process for all emergency calls, with update protocols to limit direct contact with any potential coronavirus case. For emergency calls related to COVID-19 symptoms that result in a non-admittance, WMC has designated a vehicle to ensure patients return home without risk of contaminating personal or private business vehicles.

On Tuesday, the CBW declared a local emergency and placed restrictions on restaurants and bars, eliminating dine-in and drink-in options indefinitely. Governor Dunleavy echoed the mandates on a state-wide scale that same evening. Borough Manager Lisa Von Barga stated that CBW is working on informative signage for placement around town to help enforce restrictions.

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The CBW urges all residents adhere to all local, state and federal mandates encouraging social distancing throughout the community. Patients with any COVID-19 symptoms should call 907.966.8942 for more information.

throughout the pandemic. Patients with chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, cancer, or immune compromise, should contact their doctor immediately or visit the WMC emergency room if they become ill, while healthy people should self-isolate at home if they become sick.

Continued adherence to the CDC respiratory disease preventive methods is recommended, including thorough and frequent hand washing; covering of coughs and sneezes with a tissue; cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects, and getting an influenza vaccination.

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