

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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COVID-19 Stakeholders Discuss Mandates, Surge Plans, Virtual Care

WRANGELL, March 27, 2020 – On Wednesday, March 25, Wrangell COVID-19 responders participated in their weekly joint meeting to discuss the latest actions made in preparation the coronavirus reaching the island. City and Borough of Wrangell (CBW) leadership discussed state travel mandate advertisement and enforcement, while Wrangell Medical Center (WMC) administration provided information on the surge plans, should the local healthcare facility see unprecedented levels of admittance due to the coronavirus. Representatives from the AICS Clinic and Public Health Center informed team members of responses taking place at their respective organizations.

As part of a special meeting on Sunday, March 22, the CBW Assembly approved a shelter in place order, urging residents to stay home and requiring non-critical supply chain and service businesses to close for an extended period. CBW Manager Lisa Von Bargen informed joint community team members of the local signage push, made to increase visibility of state mandates and encourage social distancing. Non-adherence to the recent travel mandate could be punishable by arrest or fine, if persons are found to not have self-quarantined for 14-days upon arrival in Wrangell.

Leatha Mercurieff, SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) Vice President and WMC Hospital Administrator, stated WMC is solidifying their Tier 3 surge plan. Hospital leadership estimates the hospital could care for a maximum of up to 30 patients in the event of mass admittance, while available staffing suggests 16 patients being a more manageable number. Recently installed doors could create additional points of isolation and flex the size of a dedicated COVID-19 wing, should it be needed. A temporary shelter has been erected near the lobby entrance for use as an alternate screening site away from the emergency room in the event of a patient surge.

“At WMC, we’ve remained proactive throughout the COVID-19 outbreak,” said Mercurieff. “Details of our Tier 3 plan have been in the works since mid-February and the plan was completed this week. For the continued safety of residents and staff, we will escalate the Tier 3 response as soon as the virus poses a threat to hospital operations.”

Clinic Manager and SEARHC Director of Southern Primary Care Clinic Operations Carly Allen discussed the recent introduction of alternative visits. In order to reduce close-contact and potential contamination, AICS Clinic and Behavioral Health patients will be scheduled for phone, video, or potentially at-home appointments. The AICS Pharmacy has implemented delivery and curbside pickup for all prescriptions.

Public Health Nurse Erin Michael discussed a potential partnership with the Coast Guard to alert all harbor traffic of the active travel mandate and self-isolation requirement. Michael also spoke of the interview and investigation protocols for eventual confirmed COVID-19 cases in Wrangell, which would be handled by herself or an assigned Public Health Nurse.

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