

Press Release

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Increasing COVID-19 testing demand; decreasing COVID-19 testing supply at Maniilaq

June 1, 2020 - On May 22nd the Maniilaq Association learned of a person from the Native Village of Kivalina who initially tested positive for COVID-19 after going to the Alaska Native Medical Center (ANMC) for a medical appointment. The Maniilaq Health Center (MHC) immediately coordinated a response which included chartering a plane to allow a team of 9 staff to carry out a prioritized COVID-19 testing protocol focusing on: 1) the families that live with the person who initially tested positive; 2) clinic staff who had recent interaction with the individual; 3) residents who felt they may've come in close contact with the individual; and 4) finally other residents in the village. Approximately 325 specimens were collected and sent to ANMC for analyses. The samples gathered were sent to ANMC as Maniilaq did not have sufficient rapid test kits to accomplish the Kivalina testing effort (COVID-19 rapid tests can be analyzed at the MHC Laboratory).

Results

The individual who was initially tested positive for COVID-19 at ANMC took 2 subsequent tests which produced negative results.

All of the community testing results were also negative.

Although the first COVID-19 test was positive, according to the ANMC Laboratory Medical Director, it is a best-practice to consider the individual as a positive even if subsequent tests are negative, for the safety of the individual and the community.

Summary

The increasing need to carry out testing in the Maniilaq Service Area, including testing passengers at the local airports; testing in Maniilaq's hub (Kotzebue) including patients, employees and the community members; assisting with testing the workforce at the Red Dog Mine; and situations that require gathering samples in our surrounding villages, has put a strain on adequate testing supplies and the staff needed to meet the increasing demand. Unless Maniilaq can acquire more test kits and manpower, we will fall short of the testing needed to assess and contain COVID-19 in the region.

Along with social distancing and wearing appropriate protective masks, voluntary testing continues to be our best strategy to keep the virus from spreading to our communities. We respectfully ask all passengers to agree to a test upon arrival into Kotzebue.

Maniilaq thanks the residents of the Native Village of Kivalina, the Tribal Leadership who fully supported MHC's COVID-19 response in Kivalina, and the MHC and Village Clinic staff who stepped up to carry out testing.

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