



## KETCHIKAN GATEWAY BOROUGH, CITY OF KETCHIKAN, AND CITY OF SAXMAN

### **JOINT MEDIA RELEASE: COVID-19 UPDATE**

Date: March 18, 2020  
From: Ketchikan Emergency Operations Center (EOC)  
Contact: Kacie Paxton, Public Information Officer, 228-6605

#### **For Immediate Release**

This brief responds to questions received by the EOC on March 17 and 18, 2020:

#### **COVID-19 Testing Updates**

PeaceHealth medical center and local providers have the capability to test for COVID-19 at their locations. Ketchikan providers have the ability to collect specimens and send them off to a lab. Testing is provided to as many people per day who meet the CDC and State guidelines for testing. Local providers have not experienced a bottleneck of any kind when screening patients according to their guidelines.

Providers use the same specimen collection swabs that are used when collecting test samples for the flu, called Universal Transport Medium (UTM) Kits, to collect specimens for Covid-19 testing. PeaceHealth and other local providers have UTMs on hand, and PeaceHealth has additional resources available through the PeaceHealth system should more be needed.

Tests are not processed locally, but are sent to one of the State Public Health Labs which are located in Anchorage and Fairbanks, which has a one-to-two day processing and turnaround response time. Lab testing capabilities are also available through Quest Labs should we need it, but the processing and turnaround time would be four-to-five days. Currently, the state testing has been responsive to the tests submitted that meet guidelines.

For tests done at Creekside Family Health Clinic, the test is processed through a private contracted lab in Seattle with a turnaround time of 24-48 hours. Due to holding time limitations, tests can be collected Monday through 11 a.m. on Fridays. If you are experiencing symptoms and believe you may have been exposed, please call the clinic at 907-220-9982 prior to coming in.

Should the need arise, the Ketchikan medical providers are discussing the possibility of drive-through screening or testing. There have been no changes in the CDC screening criteria since March 16, 2020. The number of tests administered is tracked and provided on a statewide basis, updated daily on the Alaska Department of Health and Services (DHSS) website at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/COVID-19/monitoring.aspx>.

If you are experiencing a fever and symptoms, such as cough or difficulty breathing, call your healthcare provider for medical advice. It is important to call your primary care provider prior to going in to evaluate if you need to be tested and or self-isolate. The only reason to go to the Emergency Room is if you are experiencing symptoms that need immediate emergency medical care, such as severe respiratory distress.

### **Alaska 2-1-1**

For questions about what you need to do to be prepared for COVID-19 or questions about resources to help you with emergency food, shelter, senior services during this time:

Dial 2-1-1.

No matter where you live in Alaska, 2-1-1 can help connect you will answers about COVID-19. You can also email them at [Alaska211@ak.org](mailto:Alaska211@ak.org).

Ketchikan is able to provide information to 211 and they will disseminate to callers. They have increased operating hours to be from 7am to 8pm.

### **Travel and Transportation Information**

**Ketchikan International Airport Update:** At this time neither the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) nor the CDC has offered any guidance on monitoring passengers on domestic flights. We recommend people follow the health alert guidance for the traveling public available on the webpage at:

<https://gov.alaska.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/03172020-SOA-COVID-19-Health-Mandate-004.pdf>.

As of March 19<sup>th</sup>, the concessionaires on the second floor will close until further notice, including the gift shop, the snack bar, and the bar. Alaska Airlines scheduled flights are still coming into Ketchikan as normal. Airport Management has contracted out for a thorough commercial disinfectant service for the terminal building and the airport ferry tonight after the airport closes. The cleaning in-house will continue to be a high priority. All of TSA screening equipment is working as normal.

**Borough Transit Update:** Due to enhanced cleaning procedures and low ridership, starting this Friday (03.20.20) "The Bus" will be suspending "Late Night Service" routes until further notice. Friday & Saturday night scheduled departures (indicated in Yellow on the schedule) will be canceled. The Borough Transit department will be discontinuing the sale and use of punch passes until further notice. Unused or partially used punch passes may be exchanged with transit drivers for an Unlimited Monthly or saved for use at a later date. Customers who exchange punch passes in March will receive an April Unlimited that will be honored for the rest of March and April. The Borough is asking customers to refrain from riding "The Bus," if you or your family members are sick, please stay home.

Paratransit and senior van customers that are calling to receive transportation to a medical provider for a respiratory illness, must call ahead to let their provider know they are coming. They provider may instruct the client to call EMS services for transport. If the provider instructs the client to use paratransit for transport, the client will be required to wear a mask (supplied by Paratransit services).

### **School District Update**

Effective March 17th, Ketchikan High School and District Administrative Offices are closed to all staff and the public in order for this facility to be properly sanitized. (All other district facilities are currently closed due to Spring Break.) At 11 am today the KGBSD School Board convened an emergency meeting to receive an update regarding the COVID-19 situation in our community and subsequent plans to ensure the safety and well-being of all students, staff, and community members.

In light of the confirmed case in our community and updated CDC guidelines, the School Board authorized an extension of the current school closure to April 6th. This closure means that students will not return to school, but staff who have not traveled outside of Alaska will report to work and use these days as in-service to develop and implement an alternative educational program for students.

For the most current School District information, visit <https://www.kgbsd.org/Domain/80>.

### **Emergency Supplies and Housing**

We are in contact with the local armory for assistance as the need arises. There are 15 personnel that can be activated through the SEOC if needed. We currently have personal protective equipment (PPE) on hand and we have systems in place to procure additional equipment as needed. The EOC is working with community agencies to work toward housing solutions for meeting community needs in an emergency.

### **Services for Vulnerable Population**

The EOC is in the process of contacting nonprofit agencies and groups that take care of our vulnerable populations to find out which programs are continuing and how we can support them. We are working on compiling information to provide to these citizens including a newspaper insert and/or mailer.

### **Updated Borough Facility Information**

The White Cliff Building has been closed until further notice. Staff members are practicing social distancing and are working from home. Though the building is closed, business can be conducted over the phone, via email, and through the Borough website. Departmental services are being provided electronically and telephonically. For more complicated processes such as Planning and Zoning permits, the Planning staff members are coordinating with customers to find solutions to meet their needs. Maps and plans can be reviewed and discussed via email or videoconferencing.

### **Parks and Recreation Update**

On Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup> @ 9:00 a.m. Amanda Davidshofer will be giving a yoga class via Facebook Live on the Parks and Recreation Facebook page and KPU will be recording for Live In Ketchikan. The yoga session will be about 45 minutes (roughly). <https://www.facebook.com/ketchikanparksandrec/>.

### **EOC Information**

For this emergency because of the nature and need to practice social distancing we have established our EOC in a virtual format and are currently meeting telephonically. We may use video or web conference as necessary.

Individuals are being tested in accordance with CDC and State of Alaska priorities. Public Health is conducting a contact investigation and will direct testing of individuals that meet criteria based on contact with any confirmed case of COVID-19.

### **Continued Information**

The Ketchikan EOC is working diligently to ensure the public is notified and to take all actions necessary to respond to the situation in order to protect our community. Updated EOC structure and facility information is provided on the Borough's COVID-19 Updates page at: <https://www.kgbak.us/913/COVID-19-Response>.

#ketchikanstayhealthy #staystrongketchikan #stepsforahealthycommunity

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