

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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SEARHC to Prioritize Symptomatic COVID-19 Testing

SITKA, November 3, 2020 – The SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) is committed to preparing Southeast communities for a possible winter surge of COVID-19 cases. As of November 2, SEARHC has revised its COVID-19 testing protocols in Sitka to prioritize testing for those showing symptoms of COVID-19, or those who have been in close contact with a positive case.

Testing is no longer provided free-of-charge to asymptomatic patients. Patients seeking asymptomatic testing for travel or work must cover testing fees with private health insurance plans or pay out-of-pocket at the time of testing.

“The success of asymptomatic COVID-19 testing in Southeast communities has given us a clearer picture of how COVID has impacted our region,” said Dr. Elliot Bruhl, Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer. “Due to the low incident rate and the high volume of tests, the best way to care for our community coming into flu season is to prioritize symptomatic testing, ensuring testing supplies remain ample and test results can be processed as rapidly as possible.”

Through a grant provided by Indian Health Services (IHS), SEARHC has provided free, asymptomatic COVID-19 tests to more than 12,500 people since July. Eleven asymptomatic tests resulted in positive cases in Sitka. Due to the quantity of testing, the grant has been exhausted. SEARHC will continue testing frontline healthcare workers and emergency response personnel.

COVID-19 tests are available to all who meet the symptomatic guidelines - including fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, body aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion, runny nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. If you have insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid, you must provide this information when scheduling, and SEARHC will bill your insurance. You will not have any out-of-pocket charges for symptomatic or close contact testing. Symptomatic COVID-19 tests are by referral only for community members who meet testing criteria.

“SEARHC’s highest priority continues to be the health of our patients, staff and communities,” said Dr. Bruhl. “We want to reassure you that by prioritizing symptomatic testing, we are here to care for you when you need us most. As cases rise in Alaska and the lower 48, we urge everyone to do your part to stay healthy and safe: wear a mask, wash your hands regularly, keep socially distanced and get an annual flu shot.”

If you feel ill or are experiencing symptoms, call your healthcare provider or the COVID-19 Hotline at 907.966.8799. For more information on SEARHC’s pandemic response, including testing guidelines, visit covid19.searhc.org.

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