



For immediate release: March 6, 2020

Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association statement on hospital and nursing home preparedness for Coronavirus COVID-19

Contact: Jared Kosin (907) 406-0555 or jared@ashnha.com

March 6, 2020 - Hospitals and nursing homes across the state are working with local and state public health officials to respond to coronavirus (COVID-19). Hospitals and nursing homes are 24-hour operations that are prepared to respond to unpredictable situations and infectious disease. While COVID-19 is new for the health care system, preparing to respond to emergencies is not. Hospitals and nursing homes conduct emergency preparedness training year-round, in conjunction with state and local partners.

While no one in Alaska has tested positive for COVID-19, Alaska facilities are on high alert due to the emergence of the disease in Washington State.

Hospitals and nursing homes are preparing and stand ready to help people get the care they need while protecting other patients and safeguarding healthcare workers from exposure to the virus.

Despite the on-going preparation work, hospitals and nursing homes are operating normally with planned procedures happening as scheduled.

Hospitals treat patients with infectious diseases every day. Hospital staff, from nurses and doctors to custodial workers, are well trained on precautions to keep themselves and others safe. Hospitals are closely following CDC guidelines to protect staff and keep them healthy so they can care for patients. CDC guidelines are changing as more is understood.

Just like the flu, we know that the frail and elderly are especially susceptible to this virus. That's why our nursing homes are in close communication with CDC, CMS and state officials to ensure we have the latest information and resources available.

What the public needs to know:

Attend regularly scheduled health care appointments

People should continue attending their regularly scheduled appointments for their existing health needs. Skipping appointments for chronic conditions could be detrimental to people's health and could result in the need for emergency care.

Clinics and hospitals are taking additional precautions to ensure people are safe when they come in for their appointments, including asking questions about symptoms before entering the facility. If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, you can call the hospital or your doctor's office before coming in to get instructions on how to safely enter the building to protect other patients and staff.

Most people will experience only mild illness from COVID-19

One of the biggest things we want the public to know is that most COVID-19 cases will not require hospitalization or even a trip to the ER. Community members are encouraged to practice good hand hygiene, avoid touching their face, cough or sneeze into a tissue that can be thrown away, and stay home if they aren't feeling well.

Alert your health care providers if you have severe symptoms

Clinics and hospitals are taking additional precautions to ensure people are safe when they come in for their appointments, including asking questions about symptoms before entering the facility. People with severe respiratory symptoms who need to seek care should call their provider before coming in for instructions on entering the facility in a way that protects other patients and staff.

Only visit ERs if you have an emergency

Emergency Rooms should only be used when injury or illness is an emergency. People who need treatment for non-emergency illness and minor injuries should visit a primary care or walk-in urgent care clinic. If you are unsure, call your insurance company or local health care provider's nurse triage line. Many insurance companies and health care providers also have online symptom evaluation websites.

When visiting your loved one in nursing homes

In order to keep our elders safe, please do not visit nursing homes if you have:

1. International travel within the last 14 days to restricted countries. For updated information on restricted countries visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>
2. Signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as a fever, cough, and sore throat.
3. Have had contact with someone with or under investigation for COVID-19.

Key resources for the media and public:

- [What Alaskans can do to prepare for the novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\) FAQ](#)
- **CDC webpage:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- **Alaska Department of Health and Social Services COVID-19 webpage:** <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/COVID-19/default.aspx>

Media availability: Broader information on hospital and nursing home response

We appreciate the media's role in keeping the public informed about how hospitals are responding to COVID-19. The Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association is available to provide a statewide perspective on hospital and nursing home readiness and activities surrounding the response to COVID-19.

ASHNHA is actively working with hospitals and nursing homes across the state, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, the American Hospital Association, the American Health Care Association and other partners to distribute resources, educate our broader community and assist in health care collaboration.