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**Department of Health
and Social Services**

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Staff member at Alaska Psychiatric Institute tests positive for COVID-19

July 16, 2020 ANCHORAGE – The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) has confirmed the first positive COVID-19 case in an employee at the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API). Leadership at API was informed of the positive case yesterday afternoon and immediately began notifying staff and contractors that do business at the facility about the case. The employee was tested after becoming ill on Wednesday, July 8 and has not been at the facility since that time. No other staff or patients have shown symptoms of the disease. The employee took excellent precautions to minimize the risk of exposure.

API is working with the Division of Public Health, Section of Epidemiology, on the contact tracing investigation and identifying any necessary additional precautions. As the investigation continues, anyone – including patients or staff – who may have been a close contact of the employee will be notified and provided with guidance on what actions they should take. New patient admissions to API will be on hold for at least the next 72 hours as the investigation continues.

“Since March 2020, we have established and implemented policies and practices in anticipation of a possible COVID-19 positive person at API,” said Alaska Psychiatric Institute Chief Executive Officer Scott York. “I’m grateful for the assistance the Division of Public Health has provided us to prepare for this situation, including the congregate settings guidance that has helped us mitigate and, up to this point, keep COVID-19 out of API.”

Mitigation measures implemented at API since the onset of active cases in the State of Alaska include:

- Social distancing throughout the units.
- Use of surgical masks by staff working on or entering a patient area; in non-patient areas, staff are required to wear a face covering.
- Daily screening of all employees and contractors entering the facility, including temperature and symptom assessment.
- Testing of all new admissions to the hospital; patients must have a negative test result before being admitted.
- Redesigning therapeutic group activities to adhere to social distancing guidelines with a focus on safety.
- Providing personal protective equipment to staff members based on their job function and activity, including universal masking for staff.

All staff are continually reminded to follow all required protective measures established at the onset of this pandemic:

- Immediately report any exposures and/or symptoms
- Comply with the mask policy while on the API campus
- Enhanced cleaning
- Hand hygiene
- Report for health screening when entering API at beginning of each shift

This case was reported in today's [daily case count total](#) for July 15, 2020.

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