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—ALASKA NATIONAL GUARD—

1. Alaska National Guard responds to COVID-19 threat

National Guard by Spc. Grace Nechanicky, Alaska National Guard/ April 29

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – The Alaska National Guard Joint Task Force-Logistics team is supporting three missions for the State Emergency Operations Center during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The team is in charge of sourcing and disseminating equipment and people internally to support entities within the Alaska National Guard, and externally to support community organizations that have asked for help.

The logistics team includes 31 people who were put on state active duty orders to assist with COVID-19 response efforts.

"What I do is look at the personnel we have to work with and try to maximize the efficiency of those individuals," said Lt. Col. Richard Mohammadi, commander of the JTF-Logistics team.

One team is supporting the Food Bank of Alaska by providing traffic control to ensure efficient food distribution at a site in East Anchorage. Another team is screening people at entry control points at the Alaska National Guard armory to ensure health mandates are followed. A third team will support harbor operations in Kodiak beginning May 1.

“The food bank piece is going very well,” said Mohammadi. “We’ve got 20 people in support of that operation, and when they’re not working out there, we have them working with other tasks to maximize their time.”

Sgt. Anthony Pillittier, senior enlisted leader for the JTF-Logistics team, said they are “tracking vehicles with the Army Guard and Air Guard that are all mission-capable and can be used in quick time if need be.”

JTF-Logistics also transferred people to the public affairs team to ensure effective internal and external communications.

The task force has fulfilled four requests for assistance from the State Emergency Operations Center, including taking inventory, organizing and distributing supplies for the Department of Health and Social Services warehouse in Anchorage, providing cots to two communities for alternate homeless shelter sites, and helping ensure arriving airport passengers sign the governor’s declaration to self-quarantine.

“From the very beginning, we started looking into ‘what ifs’ and possibilities, and just making sure that we had our bases covered that way,” said Pillittier.

“This is a historic occasion, and I’ve got a great staff that works well and is able to respond and be flexible with the needs of the day,” said Mohammadi. “Overall, I think we are well-prepared, and as things come up, we will continue to handle them as efficiently as we have been so far.”

Link: <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/2168838/alaska-national-guard-responds-to-covid-19-threat/>

PHOTO! <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/Alaska-National-Guard-aids-coronavirus-pandemic-missions-570023421.html>

2. Demise of RavnAir reduces rural Alaska’s medical transport options

Anchorage Daily by Associated Press/April 29

AKNG Excerpt: The state plans to use the National Guard to help transport coronavirus patients from communities. But the lack of reliable air service has placed a financial burden on rural healthcare providers that pay more for charter flights to transport patients.

Full Article: <https://www.adn.com/alaska-news/rural-alaska/2020/04/29/demise-of-ravnair-reduces-rural-alaskas-medical-transport-options/>

— NOVEL CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 IN ALASKA —

3. Zink to Alaskans: “It’s no time to let your guard down.”

Alaska Public Media by Andrew Kitchemann/April 29

Alaskans continue to see what’s called “community spread” of COVID-19 — when people contract the disease without knowing who they got it from.

For state Chief Medical Officer Anne Zink, that's a reason for Alaskans to remain vigilant.

"It's no time to let our guard down," she said during a Monday news conference. "If you can't name everyone you spent more than 10 minutes with in the last week, then you're probably spending too much time with too many people."

The state is tracking the three ways Alaskans can contract the virus: through travel, from family members and other close contacts (known as "secondary" acquisition), and by community spread.

Zink said that the state must go 28 days without a community case to say it doesn't have community spread. That's far from happening — community cases were found in Anchorage on April 21 and in the Kenai Peninsula Borough on April 17. And more community cases could be found from positive tests that are still being investigated.

When someone tests positive for COVID-19, the state wants to find out who has spent more than 10 minutes within 6 feet of that person. And those contacts will be asked to quarantine themselves for 14 days.

"And so the more you're kind of connecting to other people, the higher the chance is that you may (be) asked to be quarantined," Zink said.

These investigations — known as contact tracing — are done by teams overseen by state epidemiologists and include public health nurses and local community workers.

Zink said based on some estimates, Alaska's population could have anywhere from 50 to 700 contact tracers.

There are currently more than 100 people doing that work for the state and for individual communities. While they have the capacity to investigate more cases than they are currently, the state is working towards having 150 contact tracers.

"It's just like the epidemic," she said. "We continue to watch it closely and try to stay ahead of that curve."

Zink said the state may hire more contact tracers if needed.

Link: <https://www.alaskapublic.org/2020/04/29/zink-to-alaskans-its-no-time-to-let-your-guard-down/>

Listen: <https://www.alaskapublic.org/2020/04/24/finding-a-balance-between-economy-and-public-safety-after-covid-19/>

4. Mask making group continues to fight the war against COVID-10

KTUU by Samie Solina/April 29

ANCHORAGE (KTUU) - Anchorage Alaska Mask Makers are making it their mission to make thousands of masks to protect community members.

Wayne Jones, whose wife is a nurse at Providence, wanted to help our his spouse's coworkers and a few neighbors.

"I jumped on the neighborhood app and asked does anyone need masks, and 40,000 masks later, here we are," he said. "It's crazy."

Jones and his team of more than 200 organizers and sewers have perfected their process over the past month.

Jones and other volunteers deliver elastic, cloth and filters to those making masks. He drops off mask making kits at their doors and the next time he swings by, there will be dozens of hand-made masks with a filter inside them.

He'll then spend hours delivering the masks to residents, first responders, hospitals, businesses and more.

"I reached out and said is there any way we can get masks for the judges and court staff across the state," said Stacey Marz, the administrative director for the Alaska Court System. "Wayne immediately responded and said absolutely, that they'd be happy to help. There has been an army of dedicated people who have been sewing for us for the last several weeks."

Jones said the team has already made more than 40,000 masks and plans to make thousands more.

Much of the group's efforts have been funded by Jones himself. The group is asking for donations.

To learn more about the group and requests for masks, visit their website.

Link: <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/Mask-making-group-continues-to-fight-the-war-against-COVID-10-570030331.html>

5. Six new cases of COVID-19 reported by DHSS Tuesday

KTUU/April 28

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (KTUU) — As local governments begin adjusting to the loosening of statewide health mandates, six new confirmed cases of COVID-19 in four communities were reported by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Tuesday, bringing Alaska's case count to 351.

Anchorage: 3

Chugiak: 1

North Pole: 1

Petersburg: 1

Of Tuesday's newly reported cases, five are male — two aged 30-39, one aged 40-49, and two aged 50-59 — and one is female, aged 20-29.

The source of acquisition for all six cases is unknown and under investigation.

10 confirmed cases were reported as having recovered in the previous 24-hour reporting period. No new hospitalizations of confirmed cases or deaths or hospitalizations reported.

Recovered: 228

Confirmed cases hospitalized: 37

Current confirmed cases or Persons Under Investigation hospitalized: 16

Deaths: 9

Cases reported as recovered are not subtracted from the total case count which is cumulative.

There are 114 active cases in Alaska as of the most recent 24-hour reporting period.

17,089 tests have been completed statewide since March 2 according to DHSS data.

Link: <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/Six-new-cases-of-COVID-19-reported-by-DHSS-570014411.html>

6. Incident commander says people, businesses to make their own choices as city reopens

KTVA by Shayne Nuesca & Jennifer Summers/April 28

The Municipality of Anchorage began transitioning out of its "hunker down" phase on Monday as some businesses opened up for the first time since March.

Last week, Incident Commander Bill Falsey spoke about what it will take to expand the city's virus testing capabilities, a key factor in reopening the city. On Tuesday, Falsey provided an update on the municipality's response to the COVID-19 pandemic as Anchorage enters phase one of "easing up."

Falsey said the city has a stockpile of personal protective equipment like gloves, face masks, shields and gowns. The materials are now in high demand for businesses that are reopening.

He said the city will take requests from businesses for the materials, but its priority is making sure PPE is reserved for front-line health care providers in a worst-case scenario since the reserve is finite.

"We're going to remain cautious because this is our one-time cache. There is no more to get from the school district; no more to get from the community. The supplies we are getting from the federal government by way of the state are unpredictable," Falsey said. "And we know that in the worst-case scenario the hospitals, police department, fire department can't stop so there has to be a final reserve that will be able to keep all those people in good repair."

Falsey spoke about the metrics that led to the "hunker down" order in March and how the city used that time to bolster contact tracing and health care capacity in order to prepare for opening up the economy.

"Eventually we do have to get in the game. We can't just keep calling timeout forever; there are consequences to that," Falsey said comparing the situation to a football game.

Falsey also said full containment of the virus is probably wishful thinking and that there are still risks that the city could see a flare-up of cases.

He said now is the time for people to make their own decisions about limiting social interaction and while shops and businesses are welcoming customers again, people aren't required to go out.

"Instead of the government now saying we're going to be making the decision about whether it is the right time to weigh the risk and the reward of reopening some of those personal care services or outdoor gyms, we're allowing individuals to make that decision," Falsey said.

He said it will take a while to see the ramifications of entering into phase one of opening the economy. He reminded people to continue personal mitigation like wearing masks, washing hands and wiping down high-touch surfaces.

While the city began lifting some restrictions Monday, Mayor Ethan Berkowitz said Anchorage residents are still required to stay home as much as possible until May 5.

Link: <https://www.ktva.com/story/42065192/watch-the-latest-on-anchorage-covid19-response-as-city-begins-reopening>

7. Storybooks, radio connect kids isolated in far-flung Alaska

Dayton Now by Rachel D'Oro/April 28

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — All it takes is a few words from a storybook to connect kids over the crackle of an AM radio station. It's not 1950s entertainment, but a nostalgic way children in even the most remote Alaska communities — many with unreliable internet — can overcome further isolation brought on by the coronavirus.

The public library in the small town of Homer got creative when it had to close during the pandemic, partnering with a radio station to bring a popular story hour to preschoolers stuck at home.

Youth services librarian Claudia Haines reads some children's books — chosen to appeal to older kids or adults listening in, too — Thursday mornings on KBBI, which serves the town of 5,000 and surrounding villages. The AM station is among several radio broadcasters that have served far-flung Alaska communities for decades, chronicling their histories and cultures and even sending personal messages on the air for people far from the limited road system in the vast state.

"Radio has such a storytelling tradition," Haines said. "It's nice to see it put to use."

In this April 2, 2020, photo provided by librarian Claudia Haines, she poses for the selfie while preparing to read stories on the air at local radio station KBBI in Homer, Alaska. The library teamed up with the station to continue its popular story hour for preschoolers after it closed to the public amid coronavirus concerns. It's among ways the nation's libraries are dealing with closures amid coronavirus concerns. (Claudia Haines via AP)

The program is among ways libraries nationwide are adapting during the pandemic, according to a recent survey by the Public Library Association. Of the more than 2,500 libraries that responded, over 90% said their buildings have closed. Like the Homer library, they have expanded online services like streaming media and e-books.

They're also contributing to their communities. The El Dorado County Library in California is getting help using its 3-D printers to make face shields for hospitals and other facilities. The St. Louis County Library in Missouri partnered with a diaper bank to provide a drive-through emergency diaper service at four branches.

In Alaska, the radio story hour, which is also live-streamed on KBBI's website, has dance breaks to let young listeners burn off some energy. The program ends with time for kids to call in.

"They were really happy to call and say hello and have me recognize them," Haines said. "The spirit of the first program was, 'Hey, we've been apart while the library is closed and we're all staying home, but we're still here together in our community, and this is a way to stay connected.'"

Four-year-old Polly Fraley, a regular at the library's story time, said her favorite part of a recent show was "when everybody ate dinner" in the book "Thank you, Omu!" by Oge Mora.

Her mother, Cassy Quinlan, said her family has listened to the radio station for a long time, even communicating with friends who have spotty internet through KBBI's "bush lines" service, which allows locals to have messages read over the air. They can include anything from birthday greetings to love poems, Quinlan said.

Polly and her 6-year-old sister, Lucy, have been missing the library since it closed in mid-March. But the pandemic "is bringing people back to simplicity, you know, the basics — radio, reading, doing a puzzle," Quinlan said.

Haines, the librarian, said she jumped at the chance to connect again with families. Hosting the show is one of the few times she leaves the house, working with a single radio staffer to get it on the air.

The story hour is part of the station's larger effort to keep people connected despite their isolation, KBBI development director Loren Barrett said. It's also added weekly COVID-19 briefings with officials and a show called "Social Distance" that features live music and food talk for listeners craving new recipes.

"Radio, particularly in a small community like that ... can really focus in on children and do excellent work," retired broadcaster Al Bramstedt Jr. said.

Link: <https://dayton247now.com/news/coronavirus/storybooks-radio-connect-kids-isolated-in-far-flung-alaska>

— NOVEL CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 NATIONAL GUARD NEWS—

8. National Guard COVID-19 Response

The National Guard/April 29

New Hampshire Guard supports massive warehouse mission; New York Air National Guard supports America Strong flyover; For Guard's 102nd IW, mission and readiness must be maintained; Texas National Guard is putting Soldiers back to work; and more.

Latest news articles: <https://www.nationalguard.mil/coronavirus/>

— **NOVEL CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 NATIONAL & WORLD**—

9. Slowed increase of DoD coronavirus cases hints at a flattened curve

Military Times by Meghann Myers

The Defense Department's rate of new COVID-19 cases has slowed to its lowest pace since the beginning of the month, as diagnoses in non-service members began to diminish.

The latest data shows that 106 people tested positive on Tuesday, following 80 on Monday, down from a mid-April high that saw more than 300 new cases on some days.

More specifically, new cases this week have been concentrated with troops, as the Pentagon rolls out a plan to test asymptomatic service members in key units, while new diagnoses in the three other categories DoD tracks have slowed to a trickle.

Fourteen civilians have been diagnosed in the past two days, down from 128 new cases reported in the same period last week. Overall, 91 have been hospitalized and 375 have recovered.

During the same period, 21 dependents have been diagnosed versus 69 from Monday to Wednesday last week, for a total of 871. The number of hospitalized dependents, 33, has held steady since April 23, with 298 recoveries so far.

And just five contractors have been diagnosed with COVID-19 since Monday, bringing the total to 428, versus 62 in the same period last week. Of those 61 have been hospitalized and 143 have recovered.

Though there have been fewer cases in those three groups than in the military, they have represented the overwhelming majority of DoD's COVID-19 deaths — 25 total, or 93 percent. The department's overall mortality rate stands at 0.4 percent, compared with more than 5 percent nationwide.

The vast majority of DoD's positive coronavirus tests have come from troops this week, 159 so far, as the Pentagon moves on a plan to universally test certain units for COVID-19, regardless of symptoms, then ramp up to 100 percent testing throughout the force, and repeated testing before certain training, deployments and other travel.

Currently, certain counter-terrorism units, nuclear deterrent forces and all new basic trainees are getting tested, in addition to those who are symptomatic and medical staff working with COVID-19 patients around the country.

Coronavirus cases aboard 2nd Navy ship still rising, now 64

The number of coronavirus cases aboard the guided-missile destroyer Kidd rose to 64 as the Navy destroyer pulled into port at San Diego on Tuesday to get medical care for the crew and to disinfect and decontaminate the ship.

As of Wednesday, 4,359 service members had tested positive, up 94 cases — or 2 percent — from Tuesday. That brings the infection rate to 2,705-per-million, or nearing 0.3 percent, compared with the overall U.S. rate of 3,000-per-million, or 0.3 percent.

With two documented outbreaks aboard deployed ships, the Navy continues to have the majority of confirmed cases: 1,723 as of Wednesday 73 percent more than the Army's 998 cases. The Air Force reports 354 and the Marine Corps 359, while 809 National Guardsmen have tested positive.

Link: <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/04/29/slowed-increase-of-dod-coronavirus-cases-hints-at-a-flattened-curve/>

10. Conspiracies falsely accuse an Army reservist of being 'patient zero' of coronavirus pandemic

Army Times by Kyle Rempfer/April 28

An Army reservist recently found herself at the center of the coronavirus conspiracy mill after she participated in the 2019 Military World Games in Wuhan, China, last fall.

Sgt. 1st Class Maatje Benassi competed in cycling for the U.S. team during the October games, placing 8th in the 50-mile race despite suffering bruised ribs and a cracked helmet after crashing in the final stretch.

But the games — designed to promote peace between militaries through friendly sporting events — later became the target of conspiracies centering around the presence of U.S. troops in Wuhan, the sprawling central Chinese city where the coronavirus outbreak began months later.

Benassi, who was featured by DoD media after the race, was singled out as a potential "patient zero" for the virus in a YouTube video posted this March by George Webb, a man known for pushing conspiracies to his 98,000 subscribers. The allegations eventually spread to Global Times, an offshoot of the People's Daily, a media organ of the Chinese Communist Party.

Benassi and her husband, who is a retired Air Force officer and current Pentagon employee, have gradually become the targets of conspiracy theorists, the couple told CNN this week.

"The Army is providing support to help Sgt. 1st Class Benassi with the public attention," said Army spokeswoman Col. Sunset R. Belinsky in a statement to Army Times. "As a matter of policy, the Army would neither confirm nor deny any safety or security measures taken on behalf of an individual; however, as we would with any soldier, the Army will work with the appropriate authorities to ensure that she and her family are properly protected."

The couple spoke with CNN about the harassment they've faced, saying their home address was shared online and they shut down their social media presence after being inundated with messages from conspiracy theorists.

"It's like waking up from a bad dream going into a nightmare day after day," said Benassi, who works as a civilian security officer at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. "I want everybody to stop harassing me, because this is cyberbullying to me and it's gone way out of hand."

Benassi and her husband have never had the coronavirus. And though that element of the conspiracy was pushed most prominently on YouTube, the idea that U.S. service members brought the virus to Wuhan has also been echoed by Chinese officials.

In mid-March, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lijian Zhao made headlines when he said that perhaps it was the "U.S. Army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan" over Twitter, a social media platform blocked in China. The tweet received more than 15,000 likes and 7,700 shares, including re-tweets by Chinese diplomatic accounts.

In written responses to Senate Armed Services Committee questions this month, Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville flatly denied that there was any connection between the virus and his forces.

"There is no logical response to such an irrational accusation," he said.

Though the Pentagon has made an effort to dispel misleading narratives related to the pandemic, including setting up a webpage entitled "Coronavirus: Rumor Control," its ability to respond to disinformation has been periodically criticized by experts.

Doctrinal confusion and cultural dysfunction related to information and cyber operations is still present in the Defense Department, Herb Lin, a cyber policy scholar at Stanford University, wrote in a March 27 article for Lawfare. Those problems may be an outgrowth of the Pentagon's "pecking order," which prioritizes combat careerfields over those like psychological operations, as well as the military's sensitivity to public perceptions of terms like "PSYOP."

Some on the Senate Armed Services Committee appeared sensitive to the mission, as well. In questions to the Army chief of staff published this month, one senator asked whether overtly announcing the Army's move towards information warfare could unintentionally escalate those attacks against non-military targets in the United States.

"I do not," McConville said. "Russia and China are already contesting international norms and U.S. interests in cyberspace and the information environment. ... Stating our intent to develop this capability establishes a check on adversaries' bold use of information against military and non-military targets."

Link: <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/04/28/conspiracies-falsely-accuse-an-army-reservist-of-being-patient-zero-of-coronavirus-pandemic/>

11. Do you have coronavirus? CDC confirms 6 more common symptoms.

Anchorage Daily News by Deborah Netburn, Los Angeles Times/April 28

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention made six additions to its official list of COVID-19 symptoms this week to help doctors and patients better understand who might be sickened by the novel coronavirus.

The newly added symptoms include chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat and new loss of taste or smell.

They join the list of COVID-19 symptoms identified by the U.S. public health agency early in the outbreak: fever, cough, and shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.

If you have any of these symptoms -- and especially if you have a few of them -- it's a good idea to call your health care provider, health experts said.

You can also use the CDC's Self-Checker tool to help you decide when to seek medical care.

Dr. John Swartzberg, an infectious disease specialist at the University of California Berkeley's School of Public Health, said it is not surprising that the CDC would update its list of symptoms as more information about the virus became available. "It's what they should be doing," he said.

"This is a brand-new disease and we are learning enormous amounts about it," Swartzberg added, "including its clinical manifestations."

The novel coronavirus keeping us stuck at home has been circulating in the human population for only four months.

As more people become infected, scientists gain a better understanding of how it spreads, how it makes us sick, and how best to treat it.

As of Monday, it has infected more than 3 million people around the world and resulted in more than 210,000 deaths, according to trackers at Johns Hopkins University.

A spokesperson for the CDC said the newly added COVID-19 symptoms reflect changes in the case definition adopted by the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, or CSTE.

The CSTE is composed of epidemiologists who work in health departments across the country, and they make recommendations to the CDC about how to track and report diseases.

Swartzberg described them as the "eyes and ears of the CDC."

"They are seeing these things that are reported by clinicians and then feeding that data to the CDC," he said.

On April 5, the CSTE executive board approved a 10-page statement that laid out best practices for tracking and reporting cases of COVID-19. The statement lists symptoms that are most frequently identified with the disease.

The CSTE report notes that not everybody who is infected by the coronavirus has the same symptoms. Some people have no symptoms at all, while approximately 80% of those who do

become sick with COVID-19 experience what doctors call “mild to moderate” symptoms -- similar to having a flu, but not bad enough to require hospitalization.

Fifteen percent of cases are severe enough to require supplemental oxygen, and 5% are critical enough to require mechanical ventilation.

The CSTE report said people with COVID-19 generally develop their first symptoms, including fever and mild respiratory problems, about five days after infection.

Swartzberg said those symptoms can last anywhere from seven to 14 days, but acute cases can last longer than that.

"It's a bell-shaped curve, with some people getting sick for just a few days and others having symptoms that last longer than two weeks," he said.

As health experts continue to learn more about the disease, it is likely that other symptoms will be added to the CDC's list, said Janet Hamilton, executive director of CSTE.

"It is so new and it's rapidly moving," she said. "I couldn't tell you when we plan to update it, but updating is our normal process when dealing with emerging infections."

Link: <https://www.adn.com/nation-world/2020/04/27/cdc-confirms-six-new-coronavirus-symptoms-that-are-showing-up-in-patients-over-and-over/>

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