

Adam Crum
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**Department of Health
and Social Services**

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Clinton Bennett, DHSS, (907) 269-4996, clinton.bennett@alaska.gov

Alaska ranks highest in the nation for COVID-19 testing, per capita

August 18, 2020 ANCHORAGE— For COVID-19 testing, Alaska is currently the most tested state in the nation, per capita, followed by Rhode Island, according to [Worldometer](#), a website that ranks states and countries on several key measures in the COVID-19 response. The testing measure is cumulative and based upon all tests administered since the start of the pandemic. Alaska also ranks first among states based on the current weekly trend, according to the [Johns Hopkins University \(JHU\) Coronavirus Research Center](#).

The current JHU weekly trend for Alaska is 4.9 tests for every 1,000 people. The District of Columbia, a territory, ranks higher with 5.1 tests for every 1,000 people. New York state, with a rate of 4.1 tests for every 1,000 people, is the second most tested state.

“Everyone working on testing in Alaska has risen to the challenge and grown and adapted in ways we could not have imagined six months ago,” said Dr. Anne Zink, Alaska’s Chief Medical Officer. “We have much more work to do, but it’s important to recognize wins as we can along the way. Alaska has been particularly successful in assuring COVID-19 testing capacity. This success has been built on diverse partnerships to make COVID-19 testing accessible and affordable to anyone who needs it.”

COVID-19 tests collected in Alaska are processed by three main entities – the Alaska State Public Health Laboratories, hospitals and health care facilities and commercial laboratories. Before the pandemic, these facilities processed hundreds of tests per day. Today, they process thousands.

“The consistent effort of many Alaskans to find innovative solutions and more streamlined processes are continuing to keep our communities safer,” said Dr. Robert Onders, Hospital Administrator for the Alaska Native Medical Center (ANMC). “In order to continue to realize positive data results, we must all remain vigilant in our personal behaviors and focus on proactive measures to increase the quantity and reliability of shipments of testing supplies and continued strategic testing across Alaska.”

Numerous efforts have contributed to Alaska’s testing success. Here are a few key examples:

- When swabs began running short in March, a private company began making 3-D printed swabs at the request of Governor Dunleavy. Those swabs were successful and are still used today.
- National shortages of viral transport medium (VTM) are being supplemented by VTM produced at the Alaska State Virology Lab, as well as the University of Alaska Anchorage.
- In Anchorage, the drive-through testing site at 4115 Lake Otis Parkway was established by Providence Health & Services Alaska, ANMC and Alaska Regional Hospital. The Municipality of Anchorage continued funding of the site to help Providence Health & Services keep it open.

The Municipality of Anchorage has also added five new drive-thru/walk-up testing sites, with testing provided at no cost and without need of a provider referral.

- In April, ANMC opened an additional walk-up and drive through site on the campus of ANMC, to offer greater accessibility for all patients, employees and members of their households for symptomatic, asymptomatic and serology testing.
- The State of Alaska and Fred Meyer formed a partnership with the Alliance Christian Fellowship Church in Eagle River to offer drive-thru testing in Eagle River. Fred Meyer also partnered with the DHSS Division of Public Health, Section of Public Health Nursing, to offer a free testing site at the Carlson Center in Fairbanks with support from the Fairbanks Emergency Operations Center.
- In order to protect the Alaska Native population from COVID-19, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium has deployed more than 100 testing instruments and nearly 65,000 test kits. These assets have provided critical testing capabilities statewide to address large influxes of seasonal workers in targeted areas, helping to protect everyone in those communities.
- Through partnerships across the Alaska Tribal health system, more than 50% of the statewide testing sites are operated by partner Tribal health organizations for the benefit of all community members.
- DHSS worked closely with Assistant Secretary for Health Admiral Giroir and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to ensure point of care and local testing supplies, including reagents for Cepheid machines, to support both the fishing industry and rural areas.
- The State of Alaska, working with partners, successfully drafted and implemented plans to follow Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for testing of staff and residents of vulnerable populations in congregate settings.
- The Alaska Section of Public Health Nursing partnered with local leaders to bring testing to vulnerable populations such as persons experiencing homelessness.
- Test samples from airport testing sites were routed to Curative-KorvaLabs in California, allowing for a higher volume of tests to be processed.
- The State Public Health Laboratories implemented a new IT system and expanded their workforce to include University of Alaska Fairbanks students and Alaska National Guard members. In the Anchorage lab, partners including the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation Environmental Health Lab, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Genetics Lab, the Department of Public Safety State Crime Lab, the CDC's Arctic Investigations Program, and National Guard's 103rd WMD-Civil Support Team provided personnel assistance.
- Communities and health care facilities across Alaska set up testing sites within facilities, in addition to pop-up testing sites to fill specific testing needs.

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