Welcome to an exciting new job! The Department of Public Health Section of Epidemiology is very excited to work with you over the coming years. This packet is intended to help explain what we do, what we need you to do, and to try to connect you with resources you’ll need to develop your skills as an infection preventionist (IP). It also has information about some other important organizations you’ll be hearing from a lot, such as your local Association of Professionals in Infection Control (APIC) chapter. Use this packet to find resources that you need and to better understand the health landscape around you.

Take a look, and feel free to give us a call if you have questions!



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**Statewide overview**

Alaska is a very large state with a very small population. There are 24 hospitals of varying sizes located throughout the state. Three of the four larger hospitals are located in Anchorage, and one is in Fairbanks.

There are several groups involved in healthcare associated infection tracking and prevention. The main ones are the State Healthcare Associated Infections (HAI) Program, Mountain Pacific Quality Health (MPQH), the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNHA), and the local APIC chapter (Midnight Sun Chapter, number 065). Depending on which hospital you work at, these different organizations will have more or less of an impact on your activities. Below are brief descriptions of each group; more details are provided later.

*State HAI Program*: the State program that tracks HAI data through National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN), provides education, and assists in outbreak response. It is part of the State Section of Epidemiology, and funded by federal grants through the CDC that dictate some of the program’s activities. The HAI website is <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/hai/default.aspx> . There are numerous other State programs you will interact with, and these are described in the section on the State.

*Mountain Pacific Quality Health (MPQH*): the local quality improvement organization (QIO.) The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) require participation with a QIO for some hospitals. They have many activities related to quality improvement, including antimicrobial stewardship and some HAI tracking and prevention activities. Their website is <http://mpqhf.com/QIO/alaska/> Mountain Pacific also keeps an email listserv of all the IPs practicing in Alaska, which is a great source of information and was to connect with others. To join the Alaska IP list serve contact Lori Chikoyak at lchikoyak@mpqhf.org

*ASHNHA*: the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association. Your facility is probably a member, but may participate to varying degrees in its activities. In addition to representing the interests of healthcare facilities and personnel in the political scene, ASHNHA has many other activities. Of particular note are its regular webinars, which you can participate in, and its Healthcare Innovation and Improvement Network (HIIN) funding/program; ask which activities your facility may or may not be a part of. The HIIN is involved in HAI tracking and prevention. Their website is <http://www.ashnha.com/>

*Association of Professionals in Infection Control (APIC)*: a national organization, with many activities. The local chapter, called the Midnight Sun Chapter, is much smaller, but provides activities in Alaska. You can choose to be a member of either or both. APIC does not track HAI data, but is an important source of information on best practices in the infection prevention field. The national APIC website is [www.apic.org](http://www.apic.org) . More information on the local chapter is available in the APIC section of this packet.

*Alaska Antimicrobial Stewardship Collaborative (A2SC):* a statewide group working on antimicrobial stewardship. Your facility may be involved to some degree. ASHNHA, MPQH, and the State are all involved in the Collaborative, as well as the Alaska Pharmacists Association (AKPhA) and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC). If you are interested in stewardship, A2SC provides some educational opportunities and opportunities to work on statewide stewardship projects. <http://www.ashnha.com/antimicrobial-stewardship/>

**Section of Epidemiology**

**State HAI Program**

The State HAI program came into existence in 2009 in response to federal grant mandates. Kim Spink, RN, CIC, is the HAI Coordinator for Alaska. Until fall of 2017, the program also includes a Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) Fellow, Anna Frick, MPH. The HAI Program is part of the Section of Epidemiology, which has other activities you will be involved in that are discussed in more detail below. The HAI Program is not a regulatory body, and will not penalize you for anything it discovers (unless it is illegal, or you/your facility do not cooperate with efforts to fix a problem.)

Alaska does not have a mandatory HAI reporting law, but it does have a regulation stating that the Program has access to any data reported to NHSN (<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Documents/hai/AreHAIsReportableInAlaska.pdf>). The only extra work associated with this for you is that occasionally the facility NHSN administrator may need to accept changes in the NHSN viewing rights for the State. If the HAI program notices problems in the NHSN data you are reporting, they will probably call you to ask about it. There are no repercussions from this.

The HAI Program also provides education opportunities, in coordination with APIC, A2SC, and other partners. It is also available to answer questions and to help respond to outbreaks.

You should feel free to contact the HAI Program any time with whatever questions you have, even if the question seems silly. Additionally, if you have an outbreak or are worried that you might, the HAI Program will assist you in whatever way possible

Kim Spink can be reached at (907)269-8085 or Kimberly.spink@alaska.gov

**Other Epidemiology activities**

One unique thing about public health in Alaska is that there is a very minimal presence of local or county public health. All reported diseases come to the State Section of Epidemiology (SOE), which coordinates responses. The SOE also conducts disease surveillance and epidemiology work for the whole state. Don’t be intimidated just because it’s the State Section of Epidemiology- feel free to call us! **The SOE phone number is (907) 269-8000. After hours, you can reach the on-call SOE member at 1-800-478-0084**. SOE is always happy to answer questions, even if they seem silly to you, and can connect you with resources and experts.

 The Municipality of Anchorage does have a public health department that resembles the local health departments in other states, but it is the only one in Alaska. In other cities and villages, the public health system consists of public health nurses. The nurses administer immunizations, interview infectious disease cases, provide case management to tuberculosis patients, perform contact investigations, and perform many other duties.

Like other states, Alaska has a list of reportable diseases that you must notify the SOE about if you identify a case. The list of reportable conditions and directions on how to report located at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/Pages/pubs/conditions/default.aspx>

The SOE has several programs you may interact with. They are briefly described below:

*Foodborne/Waterborne Diseases*: Cases of foodborne disease, such as *Salmonella* infections, are interviewed to identify possible exposures, such as foods consumed and restaurants visited. This information is shared with the Division of Environmental Health Food Safety and Sanitation Program, which ensures restaurants follow appropriate protocols. Data is also stored and shared with the CDC to identify larger and more complex outbreaks. The website is <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/dod/foodwater/default.aspx>

*Influenza*: All positive influenza lab results and deaths associated with influenza are required to be reported to SOE. The State Virology Lab also does influenza testing. Other surveillance programs monitor the number of flu-related healthcare visits. If you would like to learn more about your outpatient clinic or emergency department participating in influenza surveillance( ILINet), contact the SOE influenza surveillance coordinator at 269-8000 During flu season, influenza data are aggregated and posted on the SOE website at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/influenza/fluinfo.aspx>

*Tuberculosis (TB)*: TB is a major problem in Alaska, which has one of the highest rates in the nation. Therefore, the TB Program is very active. The State has a large role in coordinating treatment for TB patients. this includes providing medication, conducting contact investigations, establishing school screening protocols, and coordinating directly observed treatment (DOT). The TB program website is at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/tb.aspx>

*Environmental*: Environmental epidemiology includes many things, such as evaluating toxic chemical exposures and blood lead surveillance. Of relevance to IPs is their role in waste disposal. Their website is at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/eph/Pages/default.aspx>

*Vaccinations:* The AK Immunization Program provides vaccines and does lots of educational stuff. Alaska has a statewide vaccine registry called VacTrAK, which all vaccinations **must** be entered into. VacTrAK support is at vactrak@alaska.gov You can get to theImmunization Program website at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/iz/Pages/default.aspx>

The Department of Public Health sometimes distributes important updates and news items through the Public Health Alert Network (PHAN.) You can sign up to receive these updates at <http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/phan/default.htm> You can also use the same link to receive the Epidemiology Bulletins, which are one-page updates, reviews, and case reports of current hot topics in Alaska.

**Outside Epidemiology**

The Department of Health and Social Services is very large and contains many other programs. A few of the ones you may interact with are described below.

*State Public Health Labs*: One important thing to note about the State Public Health Labs is that the Virology Lab is located in Fairbanks, while the rest of the Lab facilities are in Anchorage. The Labs do a great deal of testing on many things, including TB diagnostic tests, rabies tests on animals, serotyping on *Salmonella* isolates, and many others. They also coordinate shipping of samples to other reference labs in California and Washington.

The AKPHL reports most of its data out by the Bureau of Labor regions. Some TB annual reports use this as well. The regions look like this:



*DEC*: The Department of Environmental Conservation is a large department that covers air, water and environmental health regulations. Medical waste regulation is managed by this department. Their general website is <http://dec.alaska.gov/> . Solid Waste Program information can be found at <http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/sw/>. Medical waste-specific information is at <http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/docs/sw/Medical_Waste_Disposal.pdf> In addition, a fact sheet on the disposal of prescription medication is located at <http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/docs/sw/prescription_vet_medicine_disposal.pdf>

*Health Facilities Licensing and Certification*: This group is separate from the SOE. They are a team of professionals that routinely inspect health care facilities to determine if they meet both federal and state regulations. They will respond to consumer or health care provider complaints. For more information, see <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dhcs/Pages/hflc/default.aspx>

*Emergency Programs:* The Section of Emergency Programs works to prepare Alaskan communities and facilities for emergency situations, such as natural disasters and other situations where medical surge capacity is needed. They do lots of work to plan, educate, and practice emergency response. Their website is <http://www.dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Emergency/Pages/default.aspx>

**Quarantine Station**

Unique migration patterns influenced by the cruise ship and tourism industries nearly double Alaska’s population each summer. Additionally, seasonal employment with fisheries brings another several hundred workers including migrants to isolated locations throughout the state. For many ships and planes, Alaska is the first U.S. soil that is reached travelling across the Pacific. For these and other reasons, there is a Quarantine Station in Anchorage. The Quarantine Station is involved in disease surveillance and reporting on cruise ships, other travelers in-state, and also plays a role in interjurisdictional cases. Tuberculosis management is an additional area where the Quarantine Station supports public health activities in Alaska and station staff are here for you.

At some point, you will probably get a call from the Quarantine Station following up on a traveler. It is appropriate to disclose protected health information to the Quarantine Station for their investigations.

The Anchorage Quarantine station is available at (907)271-6301, 24 hours per day. You can learn more at <http://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/stations/anchorage.html>



Welcome to Alaska!

Your local Association of Professionals in Infection Control (APIC) chapter is the Midnight Sun chapter, which serves all of Alaska. The current Chapter Board and their contact information is below:

President: Lori Chikoyak, RN BSN lchikoyak@mpqhf.org

President Elect: Kim Vermedal, RN MSN CIC kvermedal@bartletthospital.org

Treasurer: Sue Anne Jenkerson, MSN FNP-BC sjenkerson@mpqhf.org

Education Chair: Kim Spink, RN BSN Kimberly.spink@alaska.gov

Secretary: Linda Russell, RN BSN CIC L.russell@MSrmc.com

You can choose to be a member of the local and national APIC organizations, just the national one, or neither. Local chapter membership costs $20/year in addition to national membership fees. Currently, the local chapter meets by webinar on Fridays once per month at 11:00 am. Membership benefits include networking opportunities, webinars, a yearly conference in Alaska, and an opportunity to connect with other IPs for mentoring and collective brainstorming. If interested, contact any of the Board members for more information.

Whether or not you choose to join APIC, consider joining the AK-IP listserv. Useful updates from public health about emerging issues and new guidelines, information about upcoming conferences and webinars from several local organizations, and reminders about upcoming deadlines are often pushed out to this listserv. Additionally, listserv members can email each other to ask questions and share resources. Contact Lori to get your email address added to the listserv.

We’re excited to have you in the Last Frontier, and don’t hesitate to reach out with any questions!

* The APIC Midnight Sun Chapter

**Where to go for help**

If you have trouble with: Contact

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| NHSN* Basics/how to use
* Concerns about your data going through
 | Local APIC, MPQH (if your facility participates)http://www.cdc.gov/nhsn/training/ SOE, MPQH (if your facility participates) |
| Needing continuing education hours | SOE, APIC |
| An outbreak at your facility | SOE |
| Best practices in the field for a particular/unique situation | APIC, the ak-ip listserv, SOE |
| To report a mandatory reportable condition | SOE |

**If you need subject-area resources:**

For injection safety: <http://www.oneandonlycampaign.org/>

For antibiotic stewardship: <http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/>

For patient education: <http://www.campaignzero.org/>

**Feel free to call SOE anytime- we’ll get you to the right people!**

**SOE Phone Number: (907) 269-8000**