



## New Infection Preventionist Welcome Packet

### Introduction

Welcome to an exciting new job! You are not alone. The Alaska Division of Public Health's (AK DPH) Healthcare Associated Infection/Antimicrobial Resistance (HAI/AR) Program team is here to partner and serve you in your role. As part of the HAI/AR team you have access to certified infection prevention specialists who can help you navigate the various areas of infection prevention and control practices (IPC) and how this may be unique and challenging here in Alaska. You also have at your disposal a team of various public health subject matter experts (SMEs) to call, resource for support and guidance and get your questions answered.

This packet is intended to help explain what we do, you will be required to do, and to try to connect you with resources you will need to develop your skills and experiences as an IPC professional. It introduces basic IPC concepts and strategies, as well as provides resources you will need to be an essential partner in improving IPC practices in your healthcare facility. It also has information about important organizations, evidence-based practices and guidelines, and ways for you to network with IPs throughout Alaska.

Use this packet to find resources that you need, to enhance your understanding of the health landscape around you and to engage with your HAI/AR Infection Prevention specialist. Take a look, and do not hesitate to reach out!

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Infection Preventionist

HAI/AR Program - Division of Public Health

## Acronyms and Glossary

AHHA	<a href="#">Alaska Hospital and Healthcare Association</a>
AKIPN	Alaska Infection Prevention Network
ASPHL	Alaska State Public Health Lab
APIC	<a href="#">Association for Professionals in Infection Control</a>
AR	<a href="#">Antimicrobial Resistance</a> / <a href="#">Antibiotic Resistance</a>
C auris	<a href="#">Candida auris</a>
CDC	<a href="#">Centers for Disease Prevention and Control</a>
CIC	<a href="#">Certified in Infection Control</a>
CMS	<a href="#">Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services</a>
CRE	<a href="#">Carbapenem-resistant Enterobacterales</a>
DPH	<a href="#">Division of Public Health</a>
HAI	<a href="#">Healthcare Associated Infection</a>
HAI/AR	<a href="#">Healthcare Associated Infections/Antimicrobial Resistance Program</a>
HIIN	<a href="#">Hospital Innovation and Improvement Network</a>
ICAR	<a href="#">Infection Control Assessment and Response</a>
IPC	Infection Prevention and Control
LTCF	<a href="#">Long Term Care Facility</a>
MPQH	<a href="#">Mountain Pacific Quality Health</a>
NHSN	<a href="#">National Healthcare Safety Network</a>
NIOSH	<a href="#">National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health</a>
OSHA	<a href="#">Occupational Safety and Health Administration</a>
PHAN	<a href="#">Public Health Alert Network</a>
QIO	<a href="#">Quality Improvement Organization</a>
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SOE	<a href="#">Section of Epidemiology</a>
TB	<a href="#">Tuberculosis</a>

## Statewide Partners

Alaska is a very large state with a very small population. There are 23 acute care hospitals of varying sizes located throughout the state including two military base facilities. Four of the six larger hospitals are in Anchorage, and two are in Fairbanks.

There are several groups involved in healthcare associated infection tracking and prevention. The main ones are the Alaska Division of Public Health's Healthcare Associated Infections/Antimicrobial Resistance (HAI/AR) Program, Mountain Pacific Quality Health (MPQH), the Alaska Hospital and Healthcare Association (AHHA), and the local Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC), named the 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.

**Healthcare Associated Infections/Antimicrobial Resistance (HAI/AR) Program:** The State HAI/AR program that tracks HAI data through National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN), provides education, assists in outbreak response, and much more. It is part of the State Section of Epidemiology and is funded by federal grants through the CDC that dictate some of the program's activities.

The HAI/AR 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):** MPQH is a nonprofit organization that strives to innovate solutions for better health and health care in the communities we serve. They partner with health care professionals, quality improvement stakeholders, patients and their families to support improved care and help educate and empower health care consumers to optimize their health and well-being. Since 2005, MPQH has supported improving health systems and population health in Alaska. Through strong partnerships, community connections and engagement, they help drive success in various health care settings around initiatives such as improved quality reporting, improved preventative health, nursing home support, infection prevention and control and the prevention and/or better management of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic kidney disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. To learn more about MPQH, visit their website at <http://mpqhf.com/QIO/alaska/>.

MPQH 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 Network (AKIPN) email listserv, contact Miranda Burzinski at [mburzinski@mpqhf.org](mailto:mburzinski@mpqhf.org) or Rebecca Hamel at [rebecca.hamel@alaska.gov](mailto:rebecca.hamel@alaska.gov)

**The Alaska Hospital and Healthcare Association (AHHA - formerly known as ASHNHA):** 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, AHHA has many other activities. Of note, they host regular webinars that you can participate in, and it has a Healthcare Innovation and Improvement Network (HIIN) program and funding. Ask which activities your facility may or may not be a part of. AHHA is partnering with the Washington State Hospital Association (WSHA) in a project called Partnership for Patients. This project works with hospitals on several HAI, adverse event, and antibiotic stewardship. If you work in a hospital, you probably have some data collection and reporting obligations as a part of this. For more information on AHHA visit their website at [www.alaskahha.org](http://www.alaskahha.org).

**Association of Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC):** is a national organization, with many activities and resources available to you even if you do not have formal membership. The local chapter, called the Midnight Sun Chapter, provides activities directly to members here in Alaska. You can choose to be a member of either

the local chapter or national chapter or both. APIC does not track HAI data but is an important source of information on best practices in the infection prevention field. Learn more about APIC on their website at [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. AHHA, 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. Learn more about A2SC on their website at <https://www.alaskahha.org/antimicrobial-stewardship-collaborative>.

## Section of Epidemiology

### State HAI/AR Program

The State HAI/AR program\* came into existence in 2009 in response to federal grant mandates. A main function of the program is to provide facilities with ongoing support using [CDC's Infection Control Assessment and Response \(ICAR\) tools](#). ICARs conducted by an Infection Prevention subject matter expert can provide you a proactive, comprehensive review of your IPC Program, areas of focus or concern, and prioritization of recommendations for improvement. ICARs can be provided virtually (if necessary) or onsite (preferred). These reviews are non-regulatory, confidential, voluntary, and at no cost to the facility. ICARs can also be reactive in response to outbreaks and/or an event that would benefit from partnership and support in your facility's response. This can include but is not limited to consultation from afar, onsite visit/observations/audits, mobilizing other resources like CDC consults and/or assisting lab testing/screening.

Alaska does not have a mandatory HAI reporting law, but it does have a [regulation](#) stating that the HAI/AR Program has access to any data that is required to be reported to NHSN by CMS. 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/AR program notices problems in the NHSN data you are reporting, they will call you to ask about it. There are no repercussions from this and is just like having an extra set of eyes on the data coming from Alaska.

Some drug-resistant organisms are reportable to the State of Alaska. This includes carbapenem resistant organisms from the Enterobacterales order, as well as carbapenem-resistant *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Acinetobacter baumannii*. The drug-resistant fungus *Candida auris* is also reportable. Isolates of these organisms should be submitted to Alaska State Public Health Lab (ASPHL). More information is available on our [website](#).

The HAI/AR Program team also provides education opportunities, in coordination with APIC, A2SC, MPQH and other partners. We are available to answer questions, to help respond to outbreaks, provide guidance and resources, and partner on applying recommendations and ensuring best practices. Feel free to contact the HAI/AR Program team any time with whatever questions you have.

*\*The HAI/AR 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 an identified risk or deviation from safe practice.*

### Your HAI/AR Program Team

**Clayton Weingartner**, Program Coordinator | 269-8000 | [clayton.weingartner@alaska.gov](mailto:clayton.weingartner@alaska.gov)

**Rebecca Hamel**, Infection Preventionist SME/ICAR SME | [rebecca.hamel@alaska.gov](mailto:rebecca.hamel@alaska.gov)

**Anna Frick**, Analyst/SME | 907-269-8010 | [anna.frick@alaska.gov](mailto:anna.frick@alaska.gov)

In addition, starting in March 2024, our team will provide bi-monthly IP Office Hours as part of the AKIPN. You can use this [link](#) to register and have these invites on your calendar at your convenience to attend. IP Office Hours:

2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month – Open, Public Health Partner spotlight, Let's chat, Q&A (30-60 minutes)

4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month – Learning series, professional development, formal presentations (60 minutes)

## Other Epidemiology Programs

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 infectious disease responses. The SOE also conducts disease surveillance and epidemiology work for the whole state. Check out the [list of infectious diseases](#) we keep track of and review short informational write ups about some of our most predominant infectious disease departments.

Don't be intimidated just because it's the State Section of Epidemiology. SOE is always happy to answer questions and can connect you with resources and experts. Feel free to call us!

During business hours, SOE office - (907) 269-8000

After hours, on-call SOE member - (800) 478-0084

The Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) and the North Slope Borough also have local health departments. In other cities and villages across Alaska, the public health system consists of public health centers and traveling public health nurses (PHN). The PHNs administer immunizations, interview infectious disease cases, provide case management to tuberculosis patients, perform contact investigations, and are available for 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. Here are helpful links: [reportable conditions](#) and directions on [how to report](#).

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. Learn more on our [website](#).

**Respiratory Pathogens:** All positive influenza, COVID, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) lab results and deaths associated with influenza are required to be reported to SOE. The State Virology Lab also does respiratory pathogen testing. Other surveillance programs monitor the number of flu-related healthcare visits. During respiratory pathogen season influenza and RSV data are aggregated and posted on the SOE website. Learn more on our [website](#).

**Tuberculosis (TB):** TB is a major challenge 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). Learn more about the state's TB program on our [website](#).

**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. Learn more on our [website](#).

**Vaccinations:** The AK Immunization Program provides vaccines and does amazing educational activities. Alaska has a statewide Immunization Information System (IIS) known as [VacTrAK](#). Facilities need to enroll to have access. We also have a platform allowing individuals to access their immunization records called [Docket](#).

**Health Alert Networks (HANs):** The CDC sends out [Health Alert Network \(HAN\) Update Alerts](#) which inform providers on urgent public health conditions and concerns. By [signing up](#) you will receive these updates, increase your awareness of what is moving around and have recommendations on what to do in the event that you are impacted by the source of

the HANs. Additionally, the [Alaska Public Health Alert Network \(PHAN\)](#) is available in which our team responds to the CDC's HANs tailoring them specific to Alaska and also sending out PHAN's relevant to Alaska. [Sign up](#) today.

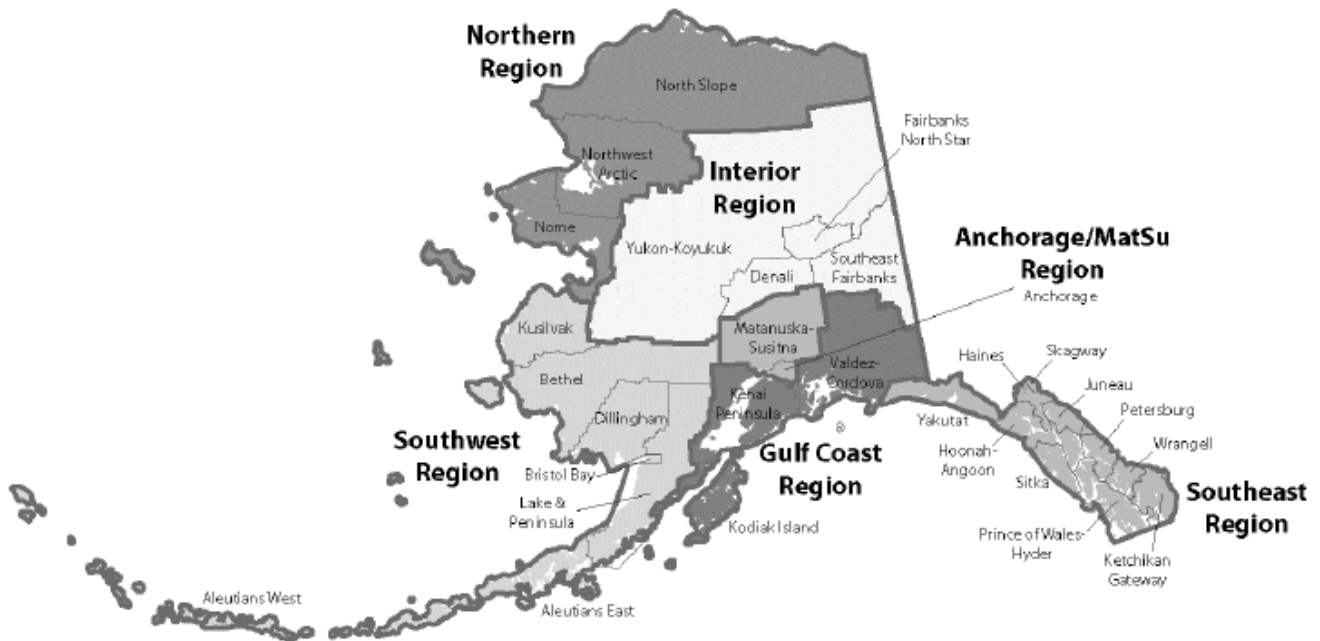
## State Programs Outside Epidemiology

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

**State Public Health Labs (AKPHL):** One important thing to note about the State Public Health Labs is that the Virology Lab is 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:

### Map of Alaska for Geographic Codes



**The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC):** The DEC is a large department that covers air, water, and environmental health regulations. Of significance to your role, medical waste regulation is managed by this department.

### [WEBSITE and RESOURCES](#)

[Solid Waste Program](#)

[Medical waste](#)

[Prescription medication](#)

**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. Learn more on their [website](#).



***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. Learn more on their [website](#).

## 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. This information is relevant to your annual program risk assessment especially if you are in a community that is impacted by tourism and/or seasonal workers.

The Quarantine Station is involved in disease surveillance and reporting on cruise ships, other travelers in-state, and 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 24/7 at (907) 271-6301. Learn more on their [website](#).



Your local APIC chapter is the Midnight Sun chapter 065, which serves all of Alaska. The current Chapter Board and their contact information is below:

**President:** Anna Lewald, RN, MPN | [alewald@sphosp.org](mailto:alewald@sphosp.org)

**President-elect:** Charlee Gribbon, RN, CIC | [cgribbon@bartletthospital.org](mailto:cgribbon@bartletthospital.org)

**Secretary:** Amy Kilroy, MPH, CIC | [amy.kilroy@providence.org](mailto:amy.kilroy@providence.org)

**Treasurer:** Rebecca Hamel, RN, MHI, CIC | [rebecca.hamel@alaska.org](mailto:rebecca.hamel@alaska.org)

You can choose to be a member of both the [national APIC organization](#) and the local APIC Chapter, just the national one, or neither. Local chapter membership costs \$20/year in addition to national APIC fees.

Membership benefits include networking opportunities, webinars, in-person trainings and education opportunities, supporting your certification journey, and connecting with other IPs for mentoring and collective brainstorming. If you have any interest or questions, please contact any of the Board members for more information.

## Additional Resources and Training

General IPC resources:

Precautions by organism - [Appendix A](#)

Project Firstline - <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/projectfirstline/index.html>

One and Only Campaign - <https://www.cdc.gov/injectionsafety/one-and-only.html>

National Emerging Special Pathogens Training and Education Center (NETEC) - <https://netec.org/>

CDC Travel Alerts - <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>

Isolation Precaution Guidelines - <https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/guidelines/isolation/index.html>

Healthcare Facility Outbreak Response - <https://www.corha.org/resources/corha-principles-and-practices-for-outbreak-response/>

Novel/MDRO Containment Strategies - [guidance](#)

Healthcare Quality Improvement - <https://nhqualitycampaign.org/>

Implementation Guides - <https://apic.org/Professional-Practice/Implementation-guides/>

Enhanced Barrier Precautions - <https://www.cdc.gov/hai/containment/faqs.html>

Respiratory Protection:

NIOSH - <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/>

NPPTL - <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/hospresptoolkit/default.html>

OSHA Respiratory Protection - <https://www.osha.gov/respiratory-protection>

Long-term Care Facility:

IP Tools - <https://www.cdc.gov/longtermcare/prevention/index.html>

Toolkit to Reduce HAIs - <https://www.ahrq.gov/hai/quality/tools/cauti-ltc/index.html>

LTCF Component Training - <https://www.cdc.gov/nhsn/training/ltc/index.html>