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

Four cases of COVID-19 identified at Alaska Psychiatric Institute

Oct. 23, 2020 ANCHORAGE – Four patients have been identified as positive for COVID-19 at the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API). API is working closely with the Alaska Section of Epidemiology to conduct contact tracing and implementing additional infection control measures to protect staff and patients. This brings the total number of cases at the facility to eight since the beginning of the pandemic: three staff members and five patients.

"As cases of COVID-19 increase all across the state, and especially here in Anchorage, it is challenging to keep the disease out of facilities such as ours," said Alaska Psychiatric Institute Chief Executive Officer Scott York. "We've had mitigation plans in place since the beginning of this pandemic and we'll continue to follow those strategies and any additional precautions the Section of Epidemiology recommend to keep our patients and staff as safe as we possibly can."

The positive patients will be moved to a separate unit where they will be isolated from other patients and expected to wear surgical masks. Staff entering and working on the unit will be minimized to reduce the risk of exposure, while ensuring patients continue to receive appropriate care.

API has been communicating with employees, contractors, union representatives and impacted patients and guardians to keep them informed and provide guidance on what actions are being taken based on their exposure risk. Other heightened measures being implemented at the facility include:

- No new admissions for 14 days.
- Using enhanced personal protective equipment, including N95 masks, eye protection, gloves and gowns.
- Reviewing care plans with providers for highly assaultive patients to minimize code grays.

Mitigation measures implemented at API since the onset of active cases in 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

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