

January 8, 2022
For Immediate Release
Contact: Derotha Ferraro
South Peninsula Hospital
907-235-0397

No Serious Illness Reported in First COVID-19 Resident Outbreak in Long-Term Care

Homer, Alaska - Though not showing any signs of illness, a resident in South Peninsula Hospital's long-term care facility has tested positive for COVID-19. This was discovered on January 7th during testing as part of infection prevention protocols following the resident's recent off-campus visit.

The resident was immediately isolated in a private room, and all residents and staff were tested. All test results were back by 10:00pm Friday evening. The other 19 residents in the facility tested negative. All long-term care employees who worked in the last week have also been tested, out of an abundance of caution. Six employees tested positive and are off work in isolation. An additional six employees are now out on quarantine due to exposure. Families of the residents were notified of the situation via phone on Friday evening, followed by a letter on Saturday morning that was posted on the hospital's website. All of the Long Term Care residents are vaccinated against COVID-19. The positive test results among staff occurred in both vaccinated and unvaccinated team members.

Long Term Care Director Rachael Kincaid, DNP is managing the situation with guidance from SPH Infection Prevention and State of Alaska Department of Epidemiology. "Our protocols and mitigation measures have been working quite effectively. We are nearly two years in to this pandemic, and this is our first resident to test positive. This facility is our residents' home, and we're a tight-knit group. Most of our Elders are unable to mask. When you consider the intimate care we provide day after day, it's pretty remarkable we've made it this long without a resident case."

Kincaid reported the staff acted compassionately but quickly, to prevent further spread of disease. "I held an emergency meeting on Zoom at 9pm to review our contingency staffing plan and PPE guidance, and nearly every staff member showed up. I am so proud of this team," Kincaid said Friday evening.

Several times over the course of the pandemic, employees of long-term care have tested positive, but infection prevention measures thus far have prevented the spread to residents. Guidelines were changed last year to allow residents to enjoy outings and visitors. States Kincaid, “While we are committed to keeping our residents safe from physical risk, social, emotional and mental well-being are an important part of their overall health. This pandemic does not appear to be going anywhere, and we must adjust along with it.”

For the next seven days, the facility respectfully requests visitors postpone their plans to come to Long Term Care. All residents and staff scheduled to work will now be tested daily. This includes fully vaccinated, those vaccinated without a booster, and unvaccinated staff.

Kincaid says having so many employees out will be challenging for the remaining staff, but not impossible. All employees eligible to work are working overtime as needed, and a team-nursing model is being used to provide safe care for residents. “We’ve been preparing for this for a long time. We are ready,” she said. Staff from other areas of the organization will be tapped if necessary to get through this staffing crisis.

The spread of COVID-19 in Alaska is at an all-time high. There were 1,750 cases reported in the state on Friday, and 1,784 on Thursday, a record high in the pandemic. For more information on South Peninsula Hospital’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, contact Derotha Ferraro, Public Information Officer at (907) 235-0397.

#