



# Valdez COVID-19 Unified Command

## NEWS RELEASE # 048

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**Valdez, AK** – The community of Valdez received confirmation of results of last week’s mass sampling event associated with those in quarantine from the recent COVID-19 exposure within the K-12 school system.

As of Tuesday, seven tests from the event remain pending. The remainder of the 160 samples collected during the November 19<sup>th</sup> event have been returned as negative for the virus at the time of testing.

Quarantine remains a longstanding and effective public health tool to reduce the spread of contagious disease. The purpose of quarantine is to separate people who may have been exposed from others during the incubation period of the virus – 14 days from the date of last exposure. This allows time to see if they develop symptoms and prevents asymptomatic spread to additional people. Those in quarantine must remain in their homes or place of lodging except to seek medical care or testing. They must avoid interacting with others, including household members and people who are also in quarantine. State of Alaska public health officials now recommend testing close contacts in the second week of quarantine.

As announced in Unified Command News Release # 045, over 184 local residents were recently placed in public health quarantine due to possible K-12 school related exposure to the virus which causes COVID-19. Upon learning about the exposures, the Valdez School District took appropriate action, quickly pivoting to provide temporary distance delivery for students to limit further spread within our local schools.

To help identify who else might be at risk, the Valdez Unified Command also partnered with the Valdez School District and local medical community to hold a voluntary mass sample collection event on Thursday, November 19<sup>th</sup>.

Approximately 160 total people provided samples for testing during the drive thru sample collection event. This involved 130 people linked to the possible school related exposure, including students and school district staff in their second week of quarantine plus their immediate household members. It is important to note, the sample collection event was voluntary and almost half of those in quarantine chose not to be tested. Approximately 30 additional people unrelated to the school district also provided samples.

“Our residents should be proud of how quickly our community partners came together to coordinate this mass sample collection event,” said Dr. Angela Alfaro, physician consultant to the Valdez Unified Command. “Over the course of a few days, people from across the community – healthcare workers, physicians, the school district, city staff, and others – quickly joined forces and planned how to make it happen. Many also braved cold temperatures, windy conditions, and significant personal protective equipment for an extended period of time while working the drive thru.”

Samples collected during the event were sent to the state lab for processing, as state lab testing is more sensitive to lower viral loads than locally available rapid testing and therefore is more appropriate for asymptomatic close contacts in quarantine.

“The recent exposure situation within the K-12 school system shows just how interconnected we are and how quickly our small community could be impacted by a small cluster of positive cases,” said Dr. Sam Shirk, Providence Medical Center chief of staff. “We are happy these asymptomatic close contacts received negative test results. However, we must also realize it could have ended very differently with many people getting sick instead. We sincerely appreciate those who take quarantine seriously, as well as those who voluntarily choose to provide samples for testing. Both of these actions demonstrate a sincere desire to protect your neighbors and prevent further spread.”

Public health officials continue to believe most identifiable transmissions in Valdez appear to be happening between family, friends, and co-workers in social or workplace settings where people let their guard down. Please be extra cautious as we move into the holiday season and look for creative ways to minimize risk as you celebrate.

We would like to commend the school district and those local businesses who continue to be COVID conscious and promote virus mitigation practices within their facilities. You can find a list of businesses who have completed the Valdez COVID Conscious Business Certification here: [www.valdezak.gov/covidaware](http://www.valdezak.gov/covidaware).

If you think you’ve been exposed to COVID-19, reach out to the Valdez Public Health Nurse (835-4612) or your medical provider for guidance on next steps. Stay home and arrange to get tested if you have even one mild symptom of COVID-19.

The Valdez Unified Command and public health officials continue to closely monitor the COVID-19 situation. We remain committed to providing information, support, and resources for our community.

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