



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

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COVID-19 DISASTER DE- CERTIFICATION MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Mike Dunleavy
Governor

THROUGH: Randy Ruaro
Acting Chief of Staff

FROM: Adam Crum
Commissioner

DATE: April 30, 2021

SUBJECT: Status of COVID-19 in Alaska, the State of Alaska's public health response to COVID-19; and notification that there is no longer a need for a Disaster Declaration under AS 26.23.020

There is no question that COVID-19 has impacted the world, the nation, and Alaska since the end of 2019. The first case of COVID-19, the disease caused by infection with the SARS-CoV-2 novel coronavirus, was detected in Alaska in March 2020.

COVID-19 spreads easily from person to person, and individuals can spread the virus before showing any symptoms, or without ever showing any symptoms at all. COVID-19 can cause severe pneumonia, respiratory failure, and death. Older individuals and people with serious underlying health conditions (e.g., lung disease, heart disease, diabetes) or immune disorders are at increased risk for severe illness. In addition, some individuals that contract COVID-19 take months to fully recover or develop post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV2 infection, also known as chronic COVID syndrome and long-haul COVID. The long-term effects of this disease are unknown.

As a result of the unknown nature of this virus, and not knowing how the state would manage it when it arrived in Alaska, I certified on March 11, 2020 that it was highly probable that a COVID-19 outbreak would occur in Alaska in the near future and that immediate actions needed to be taken to protect the public health of Alaska and reinforce the health care systems in Alaska in order to support the State's response to COVID-19 in Alaska. That certification was based upon events happening across the world at that time and was supported by the following:

- The World Health Organization declared that the outbreak of COVID-19 was a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020.
- Secretary Alex Azar of The United States Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency for COVID-19 on January 31, 2020 with retroactive effect to January 27, 2020.

Based upon my prior certification, you issued a Disaster Declaration on March 11, 2020, to prepare the state for this imminent threat. My most recent certification memo was issued in January 2021, and that certification resulted in the issuance of a Disaster Declaration on January 14, 2021; which expired on February 14, 2021. Since that time, the legislature has been debating the future management of Alaska's public health response to COVID-19 in Alaska. On April 28, 2021 the Senate passed (HB 76) which was concurred by the House. This bill (Chapter No. 2, SLA 2021) retroactively extended the Disaster Declaration with a more limited set of authorities and was signed by you on April 30, 2021.

As I have testified during hearings related to this bill, there no longer exists a need to maintain a Disaster Declaration. While COVID-19 is still present in Alaska, the urgent nature of the pandemic has passed, and we are no longer anticipating the widespread emergency that Alaska faced earlier in this pandemic. As a result of the state's early containment efforts, we have established a comprehensive public health infrastructure to respond to COVID-19 that will remain in place as we continue to work toward keeping infection rates low, testing availability high, and protecting the capacity of our health care facilities to address cases of COVID-19, while accommodating all medical- and health-related issues that the residents of our state encounter. The State of Alaska has

1. Engaged in aggressive mitigation efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19 including but not limited to, non-pharmaceutical mitigation strategies that include social distancing, proper hygiene, access to widespread testing, quarantine and isolation protocols, and interstate/intrastate travel protocols, which have proven effective in keeping the state of Alaska's COVID-19 infection rate low;
2. Worked collaboratively with community and tribal health partners to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19, to expand as needed, the healthcare system to accommodate the influx of COVID-19 hospitalizations.

3. Successful efforts to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 are reflected in Alaska having the third-lowest fatality rate, the lowest percent of positivity, and the highest testing rates compared to the other rural frontier states.

We have made significant progress combating COVID-19 by educating Alaskans on the benefits of vaccination. Alaska led the nation for two consecutive months with the highest vaccination rates since December 2020. As of April 29, 2021, 49.2 percent of everyone aged 16+ years and 74.1 percent of those 65+ years of age have received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Alaska is reporting 42.4 percent of those who are in the 16+ years of age category fully vaccinated and 69.7 percent of those in the 65+ years of age category fully vaccinated. The Department of Health and Social Services will continue to offer free COVID-19 vaccine to all Alaskans.

Based upon the above statistics, the authorities authorized under the Alaska Disaster Act, specifically AS 26.23.020, are no longer required to address the statewide response to COVID-19. The State of Alaska can manage the continuation of our response and recovery plan under the authorities provided for under Chapter No. 2, SLA 2021, by which I can declare a Public Health Emergency without needing to rely on the Alaska Disaster Act.

For these reasons, I certify that the criteria level for a Disaster Declaration no longer exists in the form of current widespread injury and increased loss of life due to infection and related illness caused by COVID-19, and that the Disaster Declaration authorized by Chapter No. 2, SLA 2021 is no longer necessary to meet the needs of the State of Alaska in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The limited authorities granted to me under Chapter No. 2, SLA 2021, allow the state to continue to effectively respond to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.



Adam Crum, Commissioner
Department of Health and Social Services

4/30/21

Date