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**Department of Health
and Social Services**

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fairbanks Pioneer Home detects new cases; all homes being actively monitored

Oct. 6, 2020 ANCHORAGE— The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) has confirmed 28 new COVID-19 cases – nine residents and 19 staff members – at the Fairbanks Pioneer Home since Sept. 21. Prior to that date, there have been six other cases – one resident and five staff members – all of whom have been released from isolation and are considered recovered.

After a positive case of COVID-19 was identified in an employee on Sept. 22, staff have been tested twice a week which has helped to identify cases in people prior to showing symptoms. Residents were being tested at the first sign of any symptoms, but beginning Monday, are also being tested twice a week regardless of symptoms.

“We are stressing the importance of infection control procedures within the home and safe practices when staff are out in the community. However, increased cases in Fairbanks make it very challenging to keep COVID-19 out of the facility since our staff live and interact within the community where the disease is spreading,” said Deputy Commissioner Clinton Lasley.

The guidance below from the Division of Public Health, Section of Epidemiology is being followed to protect all residents and employees from further spread of COVID-19:

- Enhanced PPE use – including masks, gowns and face shields – are worn together when providing close contact care to residents who are positive. Mask use has been standard practice by staff, and all residents who are willing and able are being requested to use them.
- All elders who tested positive have been placed into isolation and will have, as much as possible, dedicated staffing.
- All employees who tested positive are self-isolating at home.
- Thorough, daily sanitizing of all resident rooms in the home and all common areas including doorknobs, handrails, dining areas, workspaces, restrooms and break areas.

“We’re seeing very high numbers of cases in many communities across the state. And as we see in Fairbanks, this can increase the risk to some of our most vulnerable citizens,” warned Alaska’s Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anne Zink. “I’m urging Alaskans to stop and re-evaluate their routines and behaviors when outside of their home. The simple actions of wearing a mask, maintaining physical distance and keeping your social circle small help to reduce community spread of COVID-19. Now is not the time to be complacent about what can be a very dangerous illness, especially as we move indoors more as winter approaches.”

During the pandemic, each of the Alaska Pioneer Homes have been continually educating staff about infection control procedures; conducting health screenings of any personnel entering the building;

regularly testing employees every two weeks; sending home any employee who has symptoms and requiring testing before return; screening residents daily for symptoms; and testing residents who have any symptoms. Visitation is determined by each home based on the status of cases in the home and conditions in their community.

The other five Pioneer Homes are closely monitoring their staff and residents and are adjusting their testing frequency based on whether they have had any recent cases. The Alaska Veterans and Pioneer Home in Palmer is the only other home with a case right now after a staff member tested positive over the weekend. All residents and staff at that home are being tested. At the Anchorage Pioneer Home, it has been more than two weeks since a staff member has tested positive and no additional cases have been identified.

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