



# COVID-19

## **Alaska Pioneer Homes resume limited family visitation**

July 14, 2020 – In March, the Alaska Pioneer Homes closed their facilities to all visitors, including family members, in order to protect residents from the spread of COVID-19. This was a difficult decision to make as maintaining contact with loved ones is important to the emotional and mental health of our residents. However, it was determined those protections were necessary at that time to reduce residents' risk of contracting the disease, especially since they are more likely to become severely ill.

While alternative ways of staying in contact with loved ones using technological means have been used in the meantime, we know this long period of separation has been hard on residents and family members alike. In order to maintain quality of life for our elders, and in consultation with the Alaska Division of Public Health and the Section of Epidemiology, limited family visitation is being resumed in a controlled environment at each home. Taking this action now can help reduce feelings of loneliness, helplessness and boredom that elders are experiencing.

Visitation at the homes is beginning now that every resident and staff member in all six homes have received a baseline COVID-19 test and all test results have come back negative. Each home will implement their visitation plan on their own schedule. Other factors that are considered before offering visitation include the amount of spread of COVID-19 in a home's community, clusters of cases occurring near a home, and staffing availability. As a result, the Anchorage Pioneer Home has not yet started visitation due to the high rate of infection in Anchorage and the Fairbanks Pioneer Home, which began visits last week, stopped this week due to the large increase in infections in that city.

When visits do resume, they will be scheduled by the home, take place in designated areas that are cleaned and disinfected between each visit, and may be limited in time and frequency to allow all family and friends the opportunity to visit. Visitors will need to maintain six feet of distance between themselves, residents and other visitors; wear a face covering at all times in the home; and use hand sanitizer.

Each elder and family has the choice to participate and the homes will continue to regularly screen all staff, elders and visitors. All staff will be tested every two weeks and any resident or staff member who has symptoms will be tested immediately. If at any time a positive test result is identified, all visits will temporarily stop so the home can focus on infection control.

If you have questions about visitation at a Pioneer Home, please contact the home directly so they can update you on their status and orient you to the visitation process. The Alaska Pioneer Homes website has contact information for each home and the Central Office at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/daph/Pages/contact.aspx>.