

M/V Tustumena Press Briefing

[00:00:00] **Maura Jones:** Welcome everyone. My name is Maura Jones. I'm the deputy public information officer here at South peninsula hospital. And I'll be helping you out moderating the call today. We will begin today with presentations, from representative of several different departments of the state of Alaska, and then open it up to questions from media representatives to of RSVP.

[00:00:27] **Uh,** during the presentation, part of all this, everyone's going to be muted and I will unmute you to give your presentation. Please do a quick sound check before starting once presentations are over, we'll go to the media for questions. I'll unmute the media representatives

[00:00:42] one at a time in order to ask your questions.

[00:00:45] And again, please do a quick sound check before speaking. If there are any issues you can call in to (907) 235-0325, or you can use the chat box function in zoom as well.

[00:01:00] Okay. So let's begin with Chief Mark Kirko of the city of Homer Incident Command of the joint emergency operation center here in Homer.

[00:01:16] **Chief Mark Kirko:** Thank you, Maura.

[00:01:17] How's my sound?

[00:01:20] **Maura Jones:** Sounds great.

[00:01:21] **Chief Mark Kirko:** Okay. **Um,** so I'd like to say thank you to everybody that's participating today, especially on such short notice. **Uh,** the purpose of today's meeting media briefing is to share information surrounding the plans for today's arrival to Homer of the Alaska Marine highway ferry Tustumena. The local emergency operations center has been coordinating with local partners to provide a safe welcome of the Tusty back into Homer. And we appreciate the opportunity to work with both local and statewide partners for a unified response to this event.

[00:01:53] However, we, we, we have been fielding phone calls from community and media with questions and [00:02:00] curiosity. So are we happy to, so we are happy to respond to this event to allow for questions, **uh,** for the community and the media this afternoon, we will be hearing from representatives from the department of health and social services of epidemiology and division of health, public health nursing, the Alaska Department of Transportation and the Alaska Marine highway.

[00:02:21] **Uh,** with that, I guess we will go ahead and I'll turn it back over to you more to begin with the group.

[00:02:28] **Maura Jones:** Okay. First up today, it looks like we have a Meadow Bailey the communications director with the Alaska department of transportation and public facilities. So let me just scroll down and find a meadow here and I will unmute her Meadow.

[00:02:45] Are you there?

[00:02:46] **Meadow Bailey:** I am. Can you hear me?

[00:02:49] **Maura Jones:** Yes. Okay.

[00:02:53] **Meadow Bailey:** Thank you. And I'm actually going to turn on my video while I talk, just so that I can feel like I'm having a conversation a little bit. [00:03:00]

[00:03:00] Um, so my name is Meadow Bailey and I'm the communications director for the Alaska department of transportation. And as everyone knows on Saturday, we're alerted that a crew member aboard the Tusutmena had been notified that they had been exposed to somebody who had tested positive. And we worked to very diligently that afternoon to get testing for the crew member, that test came back positive and kind of set off, you know, working towards making sure we could get passengers and crew members, uh, to a safe place where they would be able to get further testing.

[00:03:38] And so we're kind of in the middle of that process now, uh, captain Falvey, I believe is on the call as well. And so he'll be able to talk about some of the logistics that we're working through. And we're happy to take questions. I know there's been a lot and hopefully everyone is getting all the information that they need.

[00:03:55] So I will stop there and I will turn it over to captain Falvey, if he's [00:04:00] on

[00:04:03] **Maura Jones:** okay, great. I will unmute Captain Falvey. Are you there?

[00:04:08] **Captain John Falvey:** Yes. Can you hear me? .

[00:04:11] **Maura Jones:** Yep. We can hear you.

[00:04:12] **Captain John Falvey:** Okay. Well, I'm not quite sure where you'd like me to start. Uh, I received the, uh, the phone call myself and kept the Corvallis operations manager at about one o'clock Saturday afternoon from the ship's captain indicating that we had, uh, of course a sick, uh, crew member of board, um, with most of the major symptoms, but no temperature.

[00:04:34] We did take the temperature. And, uh, um, the first thing we did per our infectious disease control plan, which is in essence, separate from our. Approved operation. Oh, mitigation plan for COVID was to, um, call the coast guard, inaccurate sector, Anchorage, uh, commander Wilcox. And we started a conversation with him.

[00:04:55] And, um, we also had the ship's captain call, the, uh, state of Alaska CDC [00:05:00] who, uh, led us to one of the, uh, epidemiology nurses, uh, in Dutch who started working from that end. Um, You know, we, we had a problem initially with the, um, the clinic being closed, uh, work with the coast guard and they, um, they got, uh, they did get some medical, um, help, uh, you know, down to test the crew member.

[00:05:20] Uh, we had that done by about six o'clock and crew member was positive. Prior to this a few hours prior to this, I did contact a state level HSS, uh, doctors, Zink and

McLaughlin, who have been phenomenal in guiding me through this. Um, and we, uh, work methodically through, um, I situation where we decided to, um, sail the boat back to Homer where it will be tonight at eight o'clock, um, with five passengers aboard, um, we did have five passengers that are in essence of tourists.

[00:05:51] They were riding from, uh, Homer, uh, Kodiak, and then down the chain and back. And, um, we did put approximately 21 passengers originating in Dutch [00:06:00] Harbor aboard. Um, they were aboard the ship for maybe an hour or so. There was no exposure whatsoever to the sick person who we had while quarantined. At that point, we put them back on shore and, uh, we sailed the boat with, um, as many people, um, in essence, quarantining on the boat, as we possibly can shy of what we need to legally sail the boat as far as our certificates and whatnot.

[00:06:23] And we've been doing that, we've been doing systematic screening, uh, twice a day, i.e. The captain checking the entire crew and the passengers, temperatures, and you know, how do they feel? Uh, everyone's doing okay so far, no temperature. There's nobody feeling bad. Of course, except for the one, um, sick person that.

[00:06:41] That we know is positive and we will be arriving in a, um, Homer tonight. I've worked closely with the, uh, the hospital there in Homer. Uh, what we did was we pre-filed all of the applications for the. [00:07:00] 35 crew and six passengers so that when the testers join the ship tonight to test everybody, uh, we won't lose a whole lot of time.

[00:07:08] And, um, we will go from there. I don't know if Dr. McLaughlin is on the line. Um, I just. Received from Dr. McLaughlin a few minutes ago, the, um, uh, the protocol for moving people off of the ship, um, after the testing. And I don't know if dr. McLaughlin's on the line, he may be able to discuss that.

[00:07:37] **Maura Jones:** Okay, thanks. So, yeah, I believe that we do have some members from epidemiology on the line today.

[00:07:46] **Captain John Falvey:** So that's what we have now. Um, and as I say, um, it may be better if, uh, uh, epidemiology, um, lets everybody know what we can and can't do. Going forward after the testing. Um, if that's possible, if not, um, I can, uh, I [00:08:00] can pull the email up and kind of review it.

[00:08:02] Um, it initially looks like it. Well, it looks like we may have a very difficult time getting crew off the boat, uh, you know, giving some of the stipulations that we have as far as their travel. So I'm, I'm, I'm trying to absorb that information, which I got maybe 10 minutes ago. Um, And, uh, you know, as regarding a go forward plan with our crew, um, we are looking at potentially bringing in some sort of commercial cleaning to really clean the boat.

[00:08:28] Well, uh, we know that, uh, we need, we need to still do that. We've been doing what we can on the northbound trip, uh, coming back up the chain, although we've had people in their rooms, absolutely as much as possible and only those out and about the boat that need to be. Operating the boat to try to keep people socially distanced, separated, and safe, um, from any further infection on the northbound trip. So that's what I've got right

now. I have, I have talked to the fire chief this morning. We had a very lengthy conversation [00:09:00] and tried to get him up to date as best I could with what I knew at this point about 8:30 this morning. So, ~~uh,~~ I think we're all on the same page.

[00:09:07] ~~Um,~~ I know there was concern about people coming off the boat initially when, when the ship arrives and I've given the captain orders, no one goes to shore until I say so. And I think the situation will be fluid when the boats get, gets to home Homer tonight. But rest assured no one will come ashore without my orders.

[00:09:27] **Maura Jones:** Okay. I think we do have a couple of representatives from epidemiology on the phone. It looks like Kate Helfrich. ~~Um,~~ I will unmute you. Are you with us, Kate?

[00:09:40] **Kate Helfrich:** Yes. Can you hear me?

[00:09:42] **Maura Jones:** Yeah.

[00:09:44] **Kate Helfrich:** Wonderful. Well, thank you all for joining. ~~Um,~~ so I know this might be a slightly repetitive, but I do just want to take a minute to go over some of the basic information.

[00:09:52] ~~Um,~~ just so that we have it. ~~Um,~~ in case folks haven't been, ~~um,~~ on a briefing or haven't read some of the additional press releases that have gone out [00:10:00] already. So on June 6th at approximately 6:00 PM, testing results were received that confirmed that an employee of the Tustumena ferry was positive for COVID-19.

[00:10:09] At that time, the ferry was docked in Unalaska and the Alaska Marine Highway, Alaska public health, and many other partners, including the city of Unalaska and the Iliuliuk Clinic, ~~um,~~ had been coordinating throughout that afternoon of the sixth in response to this report of an ill employee aboard the vessel. ~~Um,~~ at that time the employee was experiencing some mild symptoms, including a runny nose and cough, and she had just received notification that a person they've been in contact with had tested positive for COVID-19.

[00:10:38] So upon receipt of that positive result at 6:00 PM, Alaska public health initiated and extensive contact tracing interview with the index client to ascertain all the pertinent details so that we would be able to communicate risk information to those who were exposed and to provide instructions on quarantine and make some of these important public health decisions [00:11:00] of the individuals who were identified as close contacts to this crew member.

[00:11:05] All but one we're still aboard the vessel. And the names of those aboard who were exposed was communicated to the vessel leadership so that they could be notified and provided with instructions on quarantine. Obviously we have taken this a step further and out of unfunded of caution, all aboard are being asked to quarantine and are taking all measures as they're able to mitigate any potential risks.

[00:11:27] The one identified contact who was no longer aboard the vessel has been contacted by public health and provided instructions for quarantine and is being monitored

by public health in their home jurisdiction. And the positive case is isolating at this time. So I'll give that's the brief overview that I would like to, um, give it this time and then I will open it up.

[00:11:46] If other folks from the section of epidemiology would like to add additional information, um, just know that we're working very closely with many of the folks who are on this call to make sure that we do our best to protect the health and safety of [00:12:00] those aboard and, um, of those in the community as well.

[00:12:10] great. Thank you. Um, if there's anyone else on the call that wants to jump in, uh, you can go ahead and mute yourself, anyone from, um, the section of epidemiology that has joined us today.

[00:12:21] **Dr. Joe McGlaughlin:** Great. Hi there, this is Dr. Joe McGlaughlin. Can you hear me? Okay?

[00:12:26] **Maura Jones:** Yeah. Sounds great.

[00:12:27] **Dr. Joe McGlaughlin:** Oh, excellent. Okay. So I did want to add a couple of additional, um, pieces of information that I'm sure people will be wondering about.

[00:12:37] Uh, number one is disposition of the crew and passengers upon arrival, you know, Homer. So the current plan is that, uh, all, uh, I believe there's six passengers. Is that correct? Kate?

[00:12:52] **Kate Helfrich:** Yes, that is what I understood.

[00:12:53] **Dr. Joe McGlaughlin:** Six passengers, right? So all six passengers and then all of the crew were currently on board the [00:13:00] Tustumena, uh, uh, when the Tustumena arrives uh, in Harbor, uh, and docks, then there will be a swabbing event that will take place.

[00:13:08] Um, and then once all the swabs have been collected and quarantine information is obtained. then what we're saying is crew and passengers can leave the ferry while their swab swab results are pending if they're returning to their final destination or home, uh, where they can appropriately quarantine for 14 days.

[00:13:32] And they have private transportation to their final destination and that private transportation would not expose new individuals. For example, someone from a person's home who picks them up and then crew and passengers are being advised currently to remain onboard the ferry. If they need to take public transportation, uh, to get to their home or final destination.

[00:14:00] [00:14:00] Or they're unable to safely quarantine at their home or final destination, or they're unable to safely transport themselves to their home or final destination without exposing others, for example, like a taxi cab driver. And so we're going to be working with those folks who need to remain on board tonight to assure that they can get to a final destination for appropriate quarantine or isolation should any of them, uh, turn up positive and, um, in terms of guidance for passengers, um, so all passengers, anybody

who was onboard the Tustumena starting, uh, from June 1st, all the way through, uh, current day, um,

[00:14:43] Um, during, during that time period should follow the, um, following guidance for 14 days, they need to wear a mask or a face covering when in public minimize exposure to others, which means maintaining at least six feet distance, um, monitor for symptoms twice per day [00:15:00] and get tested for COVID. If any symptoms arise.

[00:15:03] And consider getting tested seven to 14 days after leaving the ship if no symptoms arise. Now, as a nurse Helfridge mentioned, none of the passengers have been identified as being close contacts to the confirmed case at this point. Now it could be that we will see additional cases that are diagnosed from the crew and the passengers who were tested tonight.

[00:15:34] And if any of those folks turn up positive, then that could change the recommendations for these passengers. Um, in terms of the, the northbound passengers who boarded the Tustumena ferry, um, while in Unalaska briefly, On Sunday evening and then subsequently disembarked. They were on board for about, uh, just under three hours.

[00:15:58] Um, they're being [00:16:00] instructed to self monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 for the next 14 days and get tested. Um, if any symptoms arise that's because the index case, the patient who has been confirmed with COVID-19 was in isolation when they were on board the vessel. So they had no contact with her.

[00:16:21] Um, the vessel crew had been really vigilantly cleaning the vessel. Um, and so at this point, we're, we're saying. The current guidance is out of an abundance of caution, even though they didn't have any contact with that case, there is still always the possibility as is true, you know, really anywhere right now, but there is the possibility for fomite transmission, which would be somebody touching a surface that had been contaminated with the virus and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

[00:16:53] So we think that that is a much less common route of infection than previously believed. [00:17:00] And that's the guidance that CDC is putting out. However, it still may well be, uh, a route of infection for some cases. And so those folks should definitely monitor for signs and symptoms for the next 14 days. So, as I mentioned, uh, as the investigation continues.

[00:17:17] The Alaska department of health and social services will provide further guidance as warranted. And maybe I can turn it over to Dr. Anne Zink to see if Dr. Zink, anything else you'd like to add.

[00:17:30] **Dr. Anne Zink:** Thank you, Dr. McLaughlin, and thank you to everyone else who is on this call. Um, biggest thing I just really want to say is just thank you to all the partners, as you've heard already from this call, it takes a lot of different people for any one of these outbreaks.

[00:17:41] Department of transportation has been thinking about how to mitigate COVID since the beginning. And we're working with reduced staff prior to this, to be able to try to

mitigate the disease on the ship. And so I think that that, um, was very useful and really big kudos to them quickly identified as someone who is symptomatic and we're able to get them [00:18:00] tested.

[00:18:00] As dr. McLaughlin mentioned, you know, at this time we don't know of any passengers who are close contact to this index, but we'll continue to be investigating and encourage the public to continue to stay tuned to this ongoing situation. With these outbreaks, we continue to just, I need to follow them for some bit of time.

[00:18:16] Cause sometimes it takes a while for symptoms to appear and for test to come back and for more information. The other thing is just the Homer community. Uh, the EOC their really South Peninsula Hospital, being willing to do testing run through the night to help support this ferry coming in. It has been absolutely tremendous.

[00:18:32] It's been very much a can do attitude of let's figure this out together. We will continue to see cases as long as there is a world pandemic going on that outbreak in different areas. There's no way to a hundred percent. Uh, prevent all of those, but through these mitigation efforts together, we really can prevent, um, a couple of cases from turning into a full bunch of cases.

[00:18:50] And so really appreciate the partnership across the board, uh, public health nursing all the way through the mayor's office. So I appreciate it. And we'll continue to partner together as we move forward that I'll hand it back over.

[00:19:04] [00:19:00] **Maura Jones:** Thank you, Dr. Zink. I believe that is all of our presenters. Uh, so thank you to all of our panelists. Uh, we will now turn it over to the media for questions, uh, panelists, please unmute yourself. Uh, when you'd like to answer a question and media, if you would please state who your question is directed to.

[00:19:21] If there's a preference, please do a sound check. Before asking your question and please keep to the topic of the Alaska Marine highway and the testimony in response. Uh, we are going to start with Aaron Walling from KTVF fair banks.

[00:19:38] **Aaron Walling:** Is the audio working?

[00:19:41] **Maura Jones:** Sounds good.

[00:19:42] **Aaron Walling:** All right. So this question is for, um, any of the panelists that talk, cause I don't know,

[00:19:46] preference wise, but.

[00:19:49] What has been some of the, uh, what has been the atmosphere like with the crew that is on there as they are pretty much in uncharted waters? Cause this is the first time we're experiencing something with the ferry system.

[00:20:00] [00:20:00] **Captain John Falvey:** This is Captain Falvey the, uh, director of the system. Um, the crew was doing fine. I've been in daily contact with the captain, very experienced, uh, uh Seafarer um, their spirits are good, everybody's feeling fine right now.

Um, and we are staying as, um, quarantined as we can and still run the ship. And, um, you know, as far as I'm concerned, uh, um, they're, they're really doing a great job.

[00:20:23] I've gotten great guidance from Dr. Zink and Dr. McLaughlin and they have followed those directions. Exactly. Uh, and, and so far, I, I, I think we're doing okay on the ship. Everything's fine with the ship right now, since I have been in daily contact with the captain.

[00:20:47] **Maura Jones:** Okay. Thank you. Is there anyone else who wants to weigh in on that question?

[00:20:54] all right, then we will move on next to our second question is from Hope McKenney with [00:21:00] KUCB.

[00:21:02] **Hope McKenney:** Hi, is the sound working?

[00:21:06] **Maura Jones:** Yep we can hear you.

[00:21:07] **Hope McKenney:** Okay. Um, I think there's been a lot of concern here in Unalaska about the timeline. I was wondering whose call was it to board, despite knowing that. They had a pending test with a symptomatic crew member.

[00:21:24] **Captain John Falvey:** Oh, I suppose Captain Falvey. I may be able to answer that. Uh, we, we, we had the crew member while isolated, um, you know, uh, in, in a cabin, uh, ventilation secured, um, mask face covering on and, um, you know, that was a, that was a Marine highway decision to put aboard those passengers.

[00:21:44] **Meadow Bailey:** This is Meadow Bailey with DOT, Captain Falvey.

[00:21:46] If it's okay I'll kind of jump in and explain to you that this, these, the alert that we received, that there had been, uh, an employee who was in contact with somebody who tested positive happened just a couple of hours before people started to [00:22:00] board. And so a lot of these decisions were happening simultaneously.

[00:22:04] Um, in the, you know, at first notifying all of the required officials and then working to find, uh, not to determine if we could be test, get a test and what, what the arrangements would need to be and how quick that test could be returned. So those decisions in that, that scenario was happening at the same time.

[00:22:25] So we, um, you know, had the passenger isolated or sorry, the, um, employee isolated. And we were able to get testing to, to contact with the clinic at about three 30, then to get testing at five, with results at six. And as soon as we knew the results, we notified the passengers and they disembarked off of the vessel.

[00:22:47] So a lot of this happened, um, we don't know it was kind of happening

[00:22:49] **Maura Jones:** simultaneously.

[00:22:53]

[00:22:53] **Hope McKenney**: Okay. And so just to confirm though, ferry personnel was aware that there. Was a potential [00:23:00] positive case before allowing the Unalaskans to board.

[00:23:04] **Meadow Bailey**: They were aware that there had been an exposure.

[00:23:09] **Hope McKenney**: Okay. And were other crew members tested on Saturday in Unalaska?

[00:23:17] **Captain John Falvey**: Captain Falvey. No, no. Just the one that, uh, was, um, showing symptoms.

[00:23:23] **Hope McKenney**: Okay are, are, but they will be tested once they arrive in Homer this evening.

[00:23:28] **Captain John Falvey**: Uh, yes, ma'am the entire crew and the six passengers will be tested, uh, commencing shortly after we arrive. We've, uh, we've done all of the, uh, registration with the hospital.

[00:23:38] I was able to do that with the captain, um, for 41, uh, persons. And we'll be ready to go once, uh, Uh, once the ship arrives and get that testing done as quickly as possible this evening.

[00:23:50] **Hope McKenney**: Okay. And I was also wondering if anyone can tell me where the one close contact who was not a crew member on the [00:24:00] ferry is currently.

[00:24:08] **Captain John Falvey**: Um, this, this Captain Falvey. Is that something epidemiology? Um, maybe what answer?

[00:24:14] **Kate Helfrich**: Yes. Hi. Um, this is Kate. Are you able to hear me?

[00:24:20] **Maura Jones**: Yes. Go ahead, Kate.

[00:24:22] **Kate Helfrich**: Okay. Great. Um, so we've been, not released that information at this time, but what I can tell you is that individual was also an employee. Um, so it is, it is not a passenger, it was another employee who's um, who's, uh, I guess you'd say shift, um, ended with a ferry and they returned to their home jurisdiction.

[00:24:41] Okay. Thank you.

[00:24:42] **Captain John Falvey**: So this is Captain Falvey. May I add a clarification?

[00:24:55] **Kate Helfrich**: Yeah.

[00:24:55] **Captain John Falvey**: Oh, okay. You know, I, I just, you know, wanted to say that, uh, you know, epidemiology had mentioned [00:25:00] that the, um, the person that we believe, uh, exposed the crew member on the ship that was on the ship. Um, this, this was another Marine Highway employee that was not working on a ship. We've got quite a few employees because we have so many ships not operating because of COVID not working.

[00:25:25] This was another Marine Highway employee that hasn't worked in, uh, as far as I've been briefed quite a few months, but happens to live in Homer.

[00:25:35] **Maura Jones:** Okay. Okay. We need to move on to the next person here. Who is John Thain with KTVA?

[00:25:45] **John Thain:** Yeah. Hi. Can you hear me? Okay.

[00:25:49] I just wondered if you could give us a little bit of background on this ferry, uh, what areas it serves, how big is it and what is its importance to the [00:26:00] communities that it serves? And, uh, and what will it be like, uh, with any disruptions in service

[00:26:05] **Captain John Falvey:** This is Captain Falvey, uh, the ferry is 198 feet long. Um, we have a maximum capacity of approximately 190 passengers, we have limited, uh, due to social distancing, the capacity to 60. Um, the ferry in essence, exclusively provide service between, uh, Homer, Kodiak, Homer and down the Aleutian Chain, uh, to Dutch Harbor stopping along the way. And, um, it is fairly critical to all of those, uh, all of those ports.

[00:26:34] As far as service, we carry approximately 36 Alaska standard vehicles, a Ford expedition size vehicle. If you will, a 36 on the boat, we carry a lot of freight, uh, especially between Homer and, uh, Kodiak and, um, you know, a lot of, a lot of freight vehicles, people down the chain to Dutch.

[00:26:55] **John Thain:** Is there any indication of how long, uh, the boat might be out of service?

[00:27:01] [00:27:00] **Captain John Falvey:** Well, we do know that we need to, uh, get everyone tested. I've just had a few moments to, uh, to, uh, review the, um, criteria for crew traveling that dr. McLaughlin has set. And I, and I, and I just received that a few minutes ago and, um, you know, you know, I'll say, you know, right now to everyone, um, knowing where the boat is in Homer and knowing how we travel people, when we move.

[00:27:25] Crew in and out and off and on that ship, we use public transportation for the most part. So we may be in a situation where a lot of that crew will be remaining aboard the boat for the 14 days. That's the way myself and some of my senior staff see it right now, uh, that, but you have to say we're in, uh, we're in a, we're in a fluid situation here now, but I see the rules.

[00:27:49] I understand the rules. Um, And we may be in a situation where we won't have the, unless the employee has a car on the dock that they can ride in by themselves. We're in a [00:28:00] tough situation. So it may be that we're going need to quarantine the ship in place for two weeks. Um, and I will have those discussions with, uh, dr.

[00:28:08] McLaughlin, uh, you know, as we move forward here, uh, from tonight, but that's the way I'm seeing it, knowing what I know about how I transport crew around, um, That's my thoughts. Um, our intent was to try to get that crew off as soon as we could and bring

another crew in, um, Uh, we've got some, we've got some crewing issues, potential shortages of crew.

[00:28:28] So, uh, it would have been a challenge, uh, which we will work working on. If we could have gotten them all off the boat, um, made to get the boat, uh, commercially cleaned somehow, um, the thought was maybe we didn't want to carry passengers for three days, uh, to avoid any, you know, touchpoints and then carry passengers.

[00:28:43] We. We had initially thought about getting, going again on the 13th, uh, on a, on a circuit around, you know, around circuit from Homer to Kodiak to Homer. The next circuit in the scheme of things would be the 16th Homer Kodiak Homer now with, um, potentially, um, um, having [00:29:00] to leave more crew aboard the boat. Uh, we have to wait and see here maybe a few weeks before we can run again, but that's remains to be seen. Okay.

[00:29:12] **Maura Jones:** Okay. Thank you. It looks like the next question is coming from Marlise. Irby with KTU U channel two news.

[00:29:21] **Marlise Irby:** Hi, how are you? Can you hear me?

[00:29:24] **Maura Jones:** Yes, we can hear you. Go ahead.

[00:29:26] **Marlise Irby:** All right. Um, that was one of the questions you mentioned that it could be potentially hard to get crew members off the boat. Um, is it only just because of how you said that to get them off the boat and to their homes or their destinations, they might have to take public transportation?

[00:29:45] **Captain John Falvey:** Yes. It's Captain Falvey. Yeah. In most cases they do. And in most cases, um, we, uh, would use Raven air, which doesn't, uh, Um, you know, is, is, is out of business, uh, to, to, to fly out of Homer up to Anchorage and then go from there. Um, the last crew [00:30:00] change we did, we moved 20, 20 employees off the boat in Homer, or a few weeks ago, and we chartered a private bus to get them to Anchorage airport to go from there.

[00:30:10] So, uh, yeah, for the most part, we, we use public transportation to move the crews, uh, You know, especially out of Homer because it's more remote, for example, a Kenai or Anchorage, um, so on and so forth. So yes, we mostly use public transportation for the crews coming in and going,

[00:30:31] **Marlise Irby:** Thank You

[00:30:32] **Maura Jones:** Okay. Uh, the next question is coming from Margie Bowman with the Cordova Times.

[00:30:55] Margie, are you there?

[00:31:07] [00:31:00] Okay. We might be having some technical difficulties. Um, I will try back in just a moment, um, for right now

[00:31:14] is, uh,

[00:31:14] Zaz from the Anchorage Daily News on the line?

[00:31:19] **Zaz Hollander:** Yeah, this is awesome. You guys hear me? Okay.

[00:31:22] **Maura Jones:** Yes.

[00:31:24] **Zaz Hollander:** Great. Uh, so I, I think I had questions for captain Falvey. Um, you, you mentioned captain that a number of crew may not be able to make these stipulations.

[00:31:32] Um, do you have any sense for how many could possibly get off the vessel? Uh, and I'm also wondering if you need to transport them back to the airport or are they, are most of the crew from out of state or are they just from, from Southeast

[00:31:45] **Captain John Falvey:** This is Captain Falvey, the most of that crew, um, is, is from, you know, the, the Anchorage, Kenai that area.

[00:31:54] Okay. So they may not be, uh, So much needing Anchorage airport. Some do a lot of the, [00:32:00] a lot of the officers, some of them actually come from out of Alaska and, and, and they move back and forth from out of Alaska. Um, you know, but once again, we, you know, we don't have access to public transportation, uh, you know, at this point.

[00:32:12] So, um, I have had our operations manager just send the, uh, You know, the latest criteria to the ship master and, um, you know, we'll get a better idea before he gets in as to how many people we think we can get off the boat. Uh, um, he will have a much better handle on that. And, and, uh, uh, you know, I'll have that information, hopefully in, in a, in an hour or two, as far as how many do we think we can get off without, uh, uh, utilizing public transportation?

[00:32:36] **Dr. Joe McGlaughlin:** Great.

[00:32:36] And Captain Falvey, sorry,

[00:32:40] this is John McLauchlan. I thought I'd just add to that. Um, so in terms of the remain on board recommendation, that's really for tonight, we want, uh, anybody can leave the ferry if they met those, those first three criteria. And then the folks who didn't meet those criteria will need to remain on board tonight.

[00:33:00] [00:32:59] And then we can. Work together to try and figure out if there is a way to safely get people back to their homes, you know, tomorrow or the next day. So, uh, you know, there may be, I'm assuming there will probably be able to come up with some good options to be able to get people back to their homes. Um, I don't know, dr.

[00:33:19] Zink, if you had anything you wanted to add to that,

[00:33:23] **Dr. Anne Zink:** Yeah, thanks dr. McLaughlin, you know, as people can see on the phone, this has been a work in progress. Uh, Captain Falvey has been amazing trying to take a new information on a moment by moment basis and process it. Uh, our, our number one goal is that health and wellbeing of Alaskans.

[00:33:37] And so that we have got to think about transportation and exposure and testing and turnaround time. The fact that South peninsula hospital was running tests all night for us is going to help us to identify if there are more positives on board or not. So there's a lot of factors that still remain unsettled and need to continue to be worked out.

[00:33:54] And that is expected during any sort of case investigation. Um, and as you can see all the details of the [00:34:00] future of where, and exactly how these people are being transported has not yet been worked out or we'd be expected to be worked out at this time. Uh, the biggest thing is just that ongoing communication and partnership, uh, with the common goal of really keeping people healthy and safe.

[00:34:14] **Zaz Hollander:** can I ask a real quick follow up question?

[00:34:17] **Maura Jones:** Sure.

[00:34:19] **Zaz Hollander:** Um, so this was probably for the captain as well. Um, I'm wondering if you can tell us what position the, the crew member who did test positive, what position she holds on the ferry on why it is, um, that, that you can be sure that she didn't have passenger contact and did the other crew who were her close contacts?

[00:34:37] Did they have passenger contact?

[00:34:42] **Captain John Falvey:** Dr. Zink? Can I answer that question?

[00:34:45] **Dr. Joe McGlaughlin:** This is Dr. McLaughlin. I think that would be identifying the patient and we really want to make sure that this patient's anonymity is preserved. It's uh, we do try to prevent people from finding out about other people's illnesses, unless that [00:35:00] person really wants that to be divulged to the public.

[00:35:05] **Zaz Hollander:** okay. Fair enough.

[00:35:07] **Dr. Anne Zink:** And to add to that, if we, at any point, think that a passenger was a close contact to a known positive, we will make sure that we let those individuals know. So, um, and that's why we kind of have these general recommendations for following signs and symptoms watching just as you would with any potential exposure.

[00:35:22] But right now, No passengers. After an extensive invest investigation by our epi team had had close contact with the person that's a known positive, but if there's more known positives, we may have to have additional recommendations.

[00:35:36] **Zaz Hollander:** Okay.

[00:35:36] **Maura Jones:** Okay. Thank you so much. I think we've got Margie Bowman here at the Cordova times figured out. Are you there Margie?

[00:35:52] **Margie Bauman:** Um, my question is how will this affect the schedule for other ferrys? Um, is there any way [00:36:00] of providing any service to these communities who now stand to lose service for the next two weeks or more?

[00:36:08] **Captain John Falvey:** Thank you. Oh, this captain Falvey, uh, Marjorie. Um, well, the, the next, uh, the next two ships in line. To commence running are the, uh, are the Kennecott and the, uh, Matanuska and those ships are slated, uh, through various combinations of routing to operate out of Bellingham, uh, which is lower 48.

[00:36:30] Um, the ships we have running now, the three are all running inside of Alaska. Okay. And that's, uh, That's one set of criteria. That's one set of travel mandates for all of us in the state. Um, we now know that there are a new set of travel mandates as of, I believe last Friday for coming in from, uh, from, from out of state.

[00:36:51] So myself and the commissioner's office will be working with, uh, doctors. Zink and McLaughlin to, uh, try to figure that out, you know, how, and if we [00:37:00] can safely operate out of Bellingham, uh, you know, with, uh, passengers coming in from the lower 48, now the Kennecott would be the one ship that will be coming up, uh, every two weeks and servicing, uh, Prince William sound.

[00:37:11] Um, so that's, um, you know, that's all part of the, um, what we call the express run. Coming out of, uh, coming out of Bellingham, um, as far as, um, you know, activating the Kennecott to, uh, come c'mon and behind the, um, Tustumena, uh, let me just say it's possible to run those routes. Um, it's possible to run down the chain routes, um, shy of, uh, fitting in Akutan.

[00:37:33] That's the only place that the, uh, the Kennecott's too big of a ship to fit in there. So, I mean, that's, if, I mean, if we see that we're going to have some sort of a very, very long delay with the Tustumena and hopefully not, I mean, that would be an option, but we haven't, uh, uh, we've really had our, our hands full, um, Trying to manage this situation at the moment.

[00:37:55] **Meadow Bailey:** This is meadow Bailey. And I wanted to mention real quickly that there's been a focus so far, really on [00:38:00] getting messaging to travelers from the lower 48 who are coming through via airports. Um, and as men, the updates to the mandate 10 were rolled out. There was really the direction that we would first focus on airports.

[00:38:12] And then starting this week, we would start to focus on what does border crossings look like and what do, um, harbor ports? What do ferry. Passengers coming in at this time, there are not passengers coming up from Bellingham yet in any direction would be developed within the next week or two.

[00:38:29] **Captain John Falvey:** Yeah. And this is Captain Falvey.

[00:38:30] The also, and as some may see, and of course, you know, the press has pretty instant access to, um, go know deliveries and press releases that we put out. And we, because we're uncertain as to how, how quickly we can get the Tustumena running again. And my goal is to get it running as quickly as absolutely possible.

[00:38:47] It's summertime what hasn't been running for a while, and I know there's a need, we, we just did put out a press release and a goal of delivery that, you know, it is canceled indefinitely, but only. [00:39:00] Only I'm sorry, only because I don't have a firm date and,

and I, I don't really like putting dates out and then canceling and putting, I mean, when we put a date out that we're going to run again, we want it, we want it to be a solid date.

[00:39:17] So we're working hard to try to get to the bottom of that. Get a new, you know, another crew in as quickly as we can and get the ball running again. That's that's the goal.

[00:39:28] **Maura Jones:** Okay, thank you. Um, next top we have, uh, Gareth Rosen from birders and Arctic today.

[00:39:49] Okay. We may have another technical difficulty here. We'll try to fix that one. And we'll move on to Annie Berman with the Anchorage daily news.

[00:40:06] [00:40:00] **Annie Berman:** yes. Can you hear me?

[00:40:09] **Maura Jones:** Yes, we can hear you.

[00:40:10] **Annie Berman:** Can you give us any more information about the six passengers, uh, where there'll be going next and how the state plans to make sure that they and the crew are abiding by quarantine?

[00:40:21] **Dr. Joe McGlaughlin:** Yeah, this is, this is Dr. MacLaughlin. So I can start with that. Um, so with respect to the six passengers who continued on with the crew from Alaska to Homer, uh, they'll get tested upon arrival in Homer. None of them have been identified as close contacts to the case at this point. Um, we're what we're advising them is to be prepared to remain in quarantine for 14 days after arrival in Homer, unless otherwise notified by public health.

[00:40:57] Um, they will, uh, [00:41:00] it's possible that we will see additional cases. Yeah. In addition to this one case that's been identified, if there are additional cases among a crew and or passengers, then it may be very difficult for us to.

[00:41:16] Determine who is and who is not a close contact. And so it's possible that, um, many or all of, uh, the passengers and crew will need to be in a full 14 day quarantine.

[00:41:28] So we're, we're really, uh, at this point going to need to see what those test results show, um, Kate Helfrich, anything else you would add to that?

[00:41:46] And

[00:41:46] Kate, you might

[00:41:47] be on mute.

[00:41:51] **Kate Helfrich:** Oh, my gosh. I was very much on mute. Thank you. Thank you though. Um, so I will add to that. We have been working very closely with, um, uh, the Alaska Marine [00:42:00] highway and have assessed, um, as part of our investigation, how these passengers had arrived to the ferry and how they had originally planned to depart.

[00:42:07] Um, so that's information that we are going to be taking and utilizing to determine, you know, where were they planning on going? And could they reach that

destination safely without access? So as in others, um, and again, just keeping that in our back pocket while we learn some additional information about the results that will happen once we get folks tested.

[00:42:26] Um, in addition, we have been coordinating very closely with the lab at South peninsula hospital and with our amazing public health nurses down there in Homer who are making sure that they're coordinating, um, Easy to understand and relevant, uh, educational materials to be handed out to all of the folks aboard that really goes through the criteria, expectations, instructions for quarantine and what to look out for.

[00:42:51] So, um, there will be clear instructions given to individuals about what. Going on what, what we're hoping that they can do to help protect not [00:43:00] only themselves, their families, but also the communities, um, that, um, they might need to travel through to get home. But again, that is all, um, information that we've gathered.

[00:43:07] And we certainly are, um, keeping that in mind while we identify additional plans for getting these folks home safely, without posing a risk to others.

[00:43:18] **Dr. Joe McGlaughlin:** Dr. MacLaughlin. I'll just add that the passengers are Alaska residents as far as we understand. Correct.

[00:43:33] **Maura Jones:** Okay. Thank you. We are going to move on Steve Straight from KEDI and KRUP.

[00:43:47] **Steve Straight:** Thank you very much. Uh, two questions. The first is the, uh, the crew member that tested positive. We don't know what position that group member worked in. However, can you tell us if that, if that worker was a resident of the state of Alaska or Washington state,

[00:44:06] [00:44:00] **Meadow Bailey:** This is meadow. And I can quickly answer that. We have identified that that crew member was around is a resident of the state of Alaska.

[00:44:12] **Steve Straight:** Thank you very much. Second question is,

[00:44:14] um, over the weekend, across Alaska, there were a lot of protests in Australia. One of the top medical doctors in Australia. Is, uh, asking, uh, Australians that participated in black lives matter protests to solve isolate for 14 days for the sake of the community and safety of the communities in Alaska, there were a lot of, uh, protests over the weekend.

[00:44:35] Do you, would you make a similar recommendations to Alaskans that participated in protest rallies to self-isolate for 14 days?

[00:44:50] **Dr. Anne Zink:** Yeah. So not specifically related to this ferry question. So that's why I was pausing to see if it was a, if we could answer it, I would just say that, you know, [00:45:00] Alaskans did an amazing job of keeping things nice and peaceful. We know that outdoor spaces are definitely safer than indoor spaces. Masks are super important to help minimize the risk of spread as well.

[00:45:12] And staying six feet apart. Um, in general, large gatherings can be an acceleration event when people are close together. And so no matter where someone's at, if they're in a family gathering with a whole bunch of people, a workspace where people aren't wearing masks and are close together, um, or in a protest where people are outside, if they are close together, We ask people to watch for symptoms and to it get tested.

[00:45:34] And this is true for all Alaskans. I point to get tested if they start to have any symptoms. So, um, we are very fortunate to state that we have a lot of beautiful outdoor space and appreciate people taking advantage of that. It's hard to know exactly what sort of interactions everyone was having. So in general, closer, together, more time and without a mask you're at higher risk.

[00:45:50] And so it's important to minimize your interaction with others and to get tested. If you have any symptoms.

[00:45:54] Thank you.

[00:45:55] **Steve Straight:** Thank you.

[00:45:58] **Maura Jones:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Zink. Um, the [00:46:00] next question is from Mark Thiessen with the associated press.

[00:46:04] **Mark Thiessen:** Thank you. Can you hear me?

[00:46:07] **Maura Jones:** Yes. Thank you.

[00:46:09] **Mark Thiessen:** This is for Dr. Zink. Uh, the situation on the app, the outbreak on the ferry.

[00:46:14] Is this any indication that the state reopened too soon from a public health standpoint?

[00:46:21] **Dr. Anne Zink:** Uh, thank you for that question again. I think we've been saying since the beginning that this is a worldwide pandemic until it is contained on a world aspect, uh, it is, uh, it's always going to be with us to some degree.

[00:46:34] We live in an international world and we have people moving nationally and internationally for everything from critical infrastructure, uh, for family, for all sorts of reasons, just at baseline. And as long as there we live in a global world and there's a worldwide pandemic, we always have a risk of COVID.

[00:46:51] We clearly met all of the criteria to open up including low case numbers for almost a month with no significant increase, as well as a testing and [00:47:00] contact tracing investigation. We are clearly on an upswing right now. We are seeing clusters and we are seeing clusters in Anchorage, some in the Mat-Su region, and then as well as the Kenai.

[00:47:10] And it's just really important that people are getting tested at the beginning of any signs or symptoms of illness. That we're keeping your circles really small using those

mass to help prevent other people from getting the disease, if you are asymptomatic or kind of pre-symptomatic early on in the disease process.

[00:47:26] **Uh,** I think that we will continue to kind of go through these bumps and roads, **uh,** moving forward. And a need. It really, it's truly up to Alaskans to be able to partner together, be kind and thoughtful for each other and doing everything we can to minimize the risk of COVID now. And until, **um,** we really have this under control worldwide.

[00:47:43] This will be, this will be a challenge for all of us.

[00:47:47] **Mark Thiessen:** Thank you. I appreciate that. And I do have that follow up question, I think for Captain Falvey, **uh,** just,

[00:47:52] could you reiterate how this crew member,

[00:47:54] **uh,** Came in contact with the disease. Was it a, did you say

[00:47:57] it was a person who [00:48:00] works for the Marine

[00:48:01] ferry system in Homer, but is not, has not worked for a while?

[00:48:04] Is that the point of contact?

[00:48:06] **Captain John Falvey:** A yes. As far as I know. Yes.

[00:48:08] **Mark Thiessen:** Great. Thank you.

[00:48:14] **Maura Jones:** Okay. Looks like next. We have Jay Barrett with KBBI Homer.

[00:48:19] **Jay Barrett:** Yeah.

[00:48:19] Hi, **uh,** thank you. Question for. **Uh,** Captain Falvey, **um,** given all the disruption from this one trip, **uh,** just the second trip for the, **uh,** for the Tustumena. How are you going to keep something like this from disrupting, you know, every other trip that the Tustumena takes all summer?

[00:48:38] **Captain John Falvey:** Well, I guess I'd have to say that somewhat of a hypothetical question. **Um,** you know, we do have an approved mitigation plan, **uh,** for all of our ships and we've been following that plan and, **um,** you know, that's what we're going to keep doing and, and hope and hope that it doesn't happen again.

[00:48:57] **Jay Barrett:** Thank you.

[00:49:01] [00:49:00] **Maura Jones:** Okay. And then we have a Megan Pacer from the Homer news. Megan, are you with us?

[00:49:06] **Megan Pacer:** Thank you. Can you hear me?

[00:49:09] **Maura Jones:** Yeah. Thank you.

[00:49:11] **Megan Pacer:** Um, first I have a clarifying question. Um, captain salving said five passengers and members of the state epi team said six. So is it five passengers or is it six passengers?

[00:49:21] **Captain John Falvey:** It's six passengers.

[00:49:24] Okay.

[00:49:25] **Megan Pacer:** And then, uh, my main question was, um, you guys have been talking about kind of the goal being to get crew members and passengers off the ship and back to their final destinations. Um, I'm wondering why local quarantining and Homer hasn't been talked about as an option. Is that just not something the state feels like it can pay for or is viable?

[00:49:44] Um, I guess, yeah. If that's not being vocal, quarantine and Homer for these people is not being considered. Why is it not being considered?

[00:49:52] **Dr. Joe McGlaughlin:** Sure. This is Joe McLaughlin. I can start with that. Fortunately, all of these people, as we understand it are Alaska [00:50:00] residents. And so we should be able to get them back to their homes for quarantine.

[00:50:05] And it's just a matter of figuring out. Uh, you know, it's Dr. Paul. He was saying, it may be a challenge for some of these folks. So figuring that out and that's, that's primarily the reason,

[00:50:15] **Dr. Anne Zink:** and this is Anne Zink. I'll just mention that the Homer emergency operation center has been absolutely fantastic coming up with all sorts of plans, including, uh, what could happen for quarantining in Homer if needed.

[00:50:26] So, uh, we, we do have numerous plans in place and big shout out to the Homer EOC for partnering with us to think about other options. If we need them.

[00:50:35] **Megan Pacer:** Thank you.

[00:50:39] **Maura Jones:** Okay. I just want to, um, give one more opportunity for Gareth Rosen to see if you had any questions.

[00:50:53] Okay. Then I'm going to go ahead and turn it back to Chief Kirko for any final comments.

[00:51:00] [00:51:00] **Chief Mark Kirko:** Thank you Maura. So I just want to, I guess, end this with a big, thank you to the, um, local, uh, unified command staff here. We've been working together pretty closely for a couple of months now and the, the seamless transition of the outside help for this event, um, has been outstanding. Um, and I can't tell you how, um, Comfortable. We felt with the amount of support throughout the state agencies, um, from captain Falvey to, uh, dr. Zink and all the rest of the partners out there that have been helping with this. So, um, with that said, I just want to say hats off to all of you for a wonderful job done. And, um, you know, we're going to get through this together and stay strong and, and everybody be safe.

[00:51:44] And that's, that's what I have from the EOC here in Homer.

[00:51:50] **Maura Jones:** Thanks so much. Uh, this ends the event a recording has been made and you can check the city of Homer and South peninsula hospital websites for that. And everyone have a [00:52:00] good evening.