

To residents of the Haines Borough:

In response to Governor Dunleavy's mandate to close all public schools in Alaska through March 30, several municipalities including Juneau, Skagway and Sitka are likewise closing public facilities including pools, libraries, museums and Senior Centers effective Monday, March 16.

The Borough understands and accepts that the best action in facing the threat of COVID-19 is to remove the opportunity for people to congregate. "Social Distancing" is the term used to describe the responsibility to leave a distance of 6 ft. between you and another person. The intended purpose of closing public facilities is to encourage no contact; the underlying message of closures is to "Stay Home." We encourage you to do so.

The CDC recommends that communities take steps to protect their citizens based upon the transmission level, and to limit activities that encourage groups of people in spaces, as this is the most common method of transmission. At this time the Borough thinks our current threat level warrants a phased and measured response. While at this time the Borough is not recommending complete closure of facilities the following steps have been implemented to limit exposure in group settings: The library will reduce the number of computer stations to four, to allow for spacing while in use. All programs (story-time, homework time, etc.) will be cancelled, the conference room will be closed and no public meetings will be allowed. Cancellation of Open swims is under discussion at the pool. The Chilkat Center will be open for business with KHNS, but the rentable rooms will be closed to groups greater than 10 persons; yoga classes have been cancelled. Our Senior Center has curtailed congregated lunch service by decision of Catholic Community Services. Lunches will be delivered to those who are signed up to participate. We will continue to stream public meetings including Assembly meetings, and consider venues large enough to allow attendees to practice social distancing. Specifics will be outlined in future releases.

Our objective in deciding if and when to close public facilities is to balance the need to address public health in face of the threat of COVID-19, but still provide a basic level of service to you. Of course we expect you to be responsible for your own health, we expect businesses to make decisions about their business plans in keeping with the need to keep people safe, and we applaud those businesses that are making adjustments in their service delivery.

The Borough is monitoring updated information from the state and federal governments about the evolving threat. As of March 15 there was one confirmed case of COVID-19 in Alaska, and that individual is quarantined in Anchorage. On Sunday afternoon, postings were made at our ports of entry: airport, border station and ferry terminal, alerting visitors and people coming home to stay vigilant.

A core team will meet on Monday morning at 10 am to discuss the details of the developing Borough plan for addressing the COVID-19 threat to our community. We are committed to putting an update of information out daily at 3 pm. Notices will be posted to our website, our Facebook page, distributed by nixel, and KHNS-FM.

I am confident that the Borough's Emergency Response Team of skilled staff and volunteers we have enlisted to advise and assist us will manage the situation to ensure safety in the delivery of borough services and suggested community behaviors. If you have any concerns about how we are managing the situation, please let us know. I appreciate and thank you for working together as a community during this stressful time.

Debra Schnabel