Swine Flu Planning Ratchets Up

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Erik Wander/KMXT

The Kodiak Island Emergency Services Organization and Local Emergency Planning Committee and the Kodiak Emergency Services Council held a special joint meeting Thursday to discuss emergency preparedness in the event of swine flu reaching Kodiak.

According to Duane Dvorak, associate planner with the Kodiak Island Borough's Community Development Department, who ran the meeting, the gathering was all about communication among various groups and sharing and disseminating information. Sally Abbott of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, speaking at the meeting by phone, emphasized that no cases of swine flu have been reported in Alaska, but that it's important to be prepared nonetheless. She also said people shouldn't be alarmed by the possibility.

-- (Abbott 1 32 sec. "In the Lower 48, the cases ... not required hospitalization.")

Abbott said that in response to the situation in the Lower 48 and around the world, DHSS has set up an emergency operations center, focused full-time on monitoring the virus and informing the public.

-- (Abbott 2 20 sec. "We have people that are ... as to what they should be doing.")

Abbott also addressed the issue of when it would be appropriate to consider taking measures such as closing schools and other community organizations and cancelling public events.

-- (Abbott 3 40 sec. "It's a very important decision ... when to pull the trigger.")

Abbott said that Kodiak has a very small stockpile of antiviral medications, such as

Tamiflu, which have proven most effective in treating patients who contract the virus. She said more is on the way, most likely by early next week. She also emphasized that there is as yet no vaccine for swine flu.

Steve Smith, chief of staff and ER physician at Providence Kodiak Island Medical Center, said patients exhibiting flu-like symptoms at the hospital have been asked to wear masks. He said the hospital does not currently have rapid tests for swine flu, only for influenza A and B, and that any positive cultures are being sent to the state for testing. Smith also said the hospital has a contingency plan in the event of an outbreak.

-- (Smith 1 40 sec. "Hopefully we won't get to ... other areas if we need to.")

Dvorak referred to the Kodiak Pandemic Influenza Annex, a plan adopted by the borough in January, as Kodiak's primary source of guidance as the situation evolves. He also proposed a series of such multi-organization meetings and creation of a joint information committee to monitor and report on any developments.

-- (Dvorak 1 45 sec. "This is our playbook ... message that we send to the public.")

Also attending the joint meeting were representatives from the U.S. Coast Guard and the Kodiak Area Native Association. As of Thursday morning, the World Health Organization was reporting 257 confirmed H1N1 infections in 11 countries. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 109 cases have been confirmed in 11 states in the U.S. with one death. I'm Erik Wander.

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