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**Department of Health  
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**STATE OF ALASKA**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Federal, state and Tribal health partners travel to rural communities to learn about sanitation concerns and preparations for the fishing season**

May 12, 2020 ANCHORAGE — A small group of federal, state and Tribal health officials is traveling to several communities across Alaska this week to listen to community concerns and determine what additional resources are needed to help prevent COVID-19 from impacting our state's fishing communities and the fishing industry.

The group includes Dr. Alexander Eastman, the senior medical officer at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Jeff Birks, his chief of staff. Alaska Department of Health and Social Services representatives include Dr. Anne Zink, Alaska's Chief Medical Officer, and Heidi Hedberg, director of Public Health. Also traveling with the group will be Ben Stevens, the governor's chief of staff, and Dr. Robert Onders, medical director of Community and Health Systems Improvement with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC).

"We're looking forward to showing our federal partners the ongoing planning efforts with our coastal communities and continuing to work together with our local, state, federal and Tribal partners to mitigate any identified gaps to prepare for a safe fishing season," said Division of Public Health Director Heidi Hedberg. "We will also be discussing rural sanitation and sewage treatment concerns. It is going to take all of us working together to come up with solutions. We communicate regularly with these communities but have not yet visited in person. We felt this trip was important so our federal partners could see firsthand the unique challenges these communities are facing and hear directly from them about their concerns."

The agenda for the trip was developed jointly by DHSS and ANTHC. Part of the group traveled today to Nome to talk with the Norton Sound Health Corporation about sanitation issues and to visit Stebbins. Wednesday the entire group will visit Kodiak and Cordova to visit with community and Tribal leaders, local health care providers and representatives from the fishing industry. On Thursday, the entire group will visit with similar representatives in Dillingham, Egegik, King Salmon and Naknek.

Prior to traveling, all travelers were tested for COVID-19; all tests were negative. Everyone traveling will be wearing a mask, practicing social distancing and taking other preventive measures to prevent COVID-19.

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