



COVID-19 Vinalhaven Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

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COVID-19 Daily Update 3-30-20

Vinalhaven: Caring, Responsible Community or Vigilante Town?

A recent incident on Vinalhaven under investigation by the Knox County Sheriff's department was picked up by multiple national news networks and garnered a lot of unfavorable press. We have prepared a press release that may or may not be published by any of those networks, because we believe that the incident does not in any way represent who we are as a community. The following is excerpted from that release.

As many of us were returning from winter vacations in the U.S. and abroad, the Covid-19 pandemic was taking hold in the U.S. and making its way into Maine. Our Public Health Team convened and called on the Town to begin the practice of social distancing and requested those returnees to self-quarantine for fourteen days. The returnees complied with the request.

Our response to the pandemic has been one of full cooperation and generous outreach to neighbors. As with all communities, businesses and individuals out of work are hard hit financially, yet all are working tirelessly to meet the needs of citizens. On just the subject of food, meals are being delivered to homes of school children, seniors, and anyone who has a need. A broad assembly of people make this happen - the school cafeteria staff, Meals on Wheels, Community Lunchbox, and Open Bible Baptist Church.

As the anxiety and loneliness of social distancing build up, community members are offering to help. One resident is growing extra seedlings so that others may start gardens, another is coaching stress relief using Zoom, the Fire and EMS crews are making fire truck and ambulance parades to help isolated youngsters celebrate their birthdays, and plans for Easter egg deliveries are in the works. Churches, social organizations, members of the ambulance service, and unaffiliated others call their members and neighbors frequently to offer cheer and information.

Yet one incident, born of fear and misinformation is what made the news. The fear comes from a true understanding that sitting twelve miles out to sea, Vinalhaven is at the end of the line. Although ICMS is staffed by dedicated professionals, it is, however, a clinic, not a hospital, and it has no overnight beds and no ventilators. Should a patient with Covid-19 require hospitalization, and if weather conditions are right, the EMS crew might be able to arrange transport off the island by fixed wing plane or rescue helicopter. It is more likely that the trip will be on a seventy-five minute ferry ride. The fear is that people from other states running from their highly infected communities could bring the virus to Vinalhaven and overwhelm its resources.

Misinformation coupled with fear led to an unfortunate incident led by one or two people. Emotions are running high throughout the nation, but on Vinalhaven the response to the Covid-19 pandemic is, for most people, a thoughtful, rational approach to slowing its progress and caring for its people, with no tolerance for vigilante action. As we continue on this difficult path of flattening the curve, let's also continue to be the thoughtful and rational people we have been to date.