



COVID-19 Vinalhaven Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

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TESTING, TRACING, AND TREATMENT

Current guidelines for **testing** were issued by the Maine Center for Disease Control (MCDC) on March 25, when Maine was designated as a state with moderate transmission. The guidelines instruct health care providers, such as ours at ICMS, to test patients when they have any of the symptoms of Covid-19, including fever, sore throat, cough, and difficulty breathing.

The ability to conduct tests at that time was very limited and symptoms alone were not enough reason to test a patient. The ill person also had to have an additional characteristic. They either had to be hospitalized, be a healthcare worker or first responder, live in a congregate setting, be over 60 years old, or have underlying health conditions.

Since that time, although the guidelines are still in effect, the number of available tests has increased, and anyone with symptoms can be tested. On Vinalhaven, ICMS is equipped with about 20 test kits. As they are used, they are replaced. Currently, test results come back within 24 hours of the swab leaving the island.

One of the keys to being able to relax some of the social distancing rules and allow some businesses to reopen is to have many more tests available. In this way, should an area have an outbreak, testing could be done on a large scale and help contain a more rapid spread. Finding the people who are carrying the virus, with or without symptoms, is critical so they can be quarantined and stop transmission to others. Testing for antibodies would be a reassuring tool for employees and employers, as people returning to work would know if they already had the virus and could expect immunity for some unknown time.

Tracing is also a key tool to containing localized outbreaks. MCDC has hired and trained many additional workers to conduct this work. MCDC Director Dr. Nirav Shah calls them “disease detectives”. When there is a confirmed case of Covid-19, the detectives make multiple phone calls to find persons that the sick person had contact with in the past 16 days. The contact will be quarantined if they determine that they have had a “significant exposure”. A significant exposure usually means being in close proximity with the ill person for more than 10 minutes, or sneezing and coughing during the interaction.

Most people who contract Covid-19 do not require hospitalization. If someone on the island were to contract the disease and was not sick enough to need to go to the hospital, **treatment** would take place in the patient’s home. There is no known cure for Covid-19 at the current time, but treatment would be to alleviate some of the

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patient's symptoms, such as using Tylenol to reduce fever. Should the patient begin to have difficulty breathing, that is when transport to a mainland hospital would be considered. Maine EMS, in conjunction with MCDC, a board of state wide physicians, and hospital representatives have established special protocols for patients who are likely ill with Covid-19 to help contain the spread and not overstrain hospital resources.

It is clear that MCDC, with direction from the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is advising Governor Mills on how best to control the spread of Covid-19 in Maine. It is setting the guidelines and protocols for health care systems to follow and overseeing the distribution of available resources.

What, then, is the role of the Vinalhaven Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in testing, tracing and treatment?

Primary responsibility for testing and treatment falls to the providers of ICMS, and if transport to the mainland is needed, to the EMS squad. Tracing is conducted by MCDC, with help from ICMS if requested.

However, the EOC supports the efforts of ICMS and EMS in many ways. The EOC coordinates efforts to obtain appropriate and adequate PPE (personal protective equipment). They have made detailed plans on how to manage an outbreak should mainland hospitals be overwhelmed with patients and unable to take ours. With the EOC's broad backgrounds and talents – public health, general healthcare, emergency healthcare, emergency management, and political management, they have become a central repository of information and disseminators of that information.

As always, please contact the EOC with your questions and for assistance. Subscribe to "Town Alerts" on the Town's website to automatically receive Daily Updates in your inbox.