



**COVID-19**  
**Vinalhaven Emergency**  
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3-31-20

**From: Town of Vinalhaven**

**To: All our Friends from Away**

*To all our friends from away,*

The public health team and staff at ICMS are working 24/7 to ensure the safety of our island residents. We hope you are safe and well and adjusting to this time of physical distancing. It is imperative that we all act now to do our part to prevent further spread of Covid-19.

As you well know, there are about 1200 islanders living year round on Vinalhaven. There is no hospital. There are no ICU beds. We have no ventilators and there are no pulmonologists or respiratory therapists.

When someone is critically ill, our team at ICMS and Vinalhaven EMS is at the mercy of the weather and crew availability to transport patients to the nearest hospital. Pen Bay Medical Center is a small community hospital that will likely become overwhelmed very quickly as the number of patients with Covid-19 rises.

**Please do not come to Vinalhaven from your primary residence.**

Our Public Health Team, Medical Center, and EMS crew are working day and night to try to keep our residents healthy and safe, but our capabilities are limited. We look forward to seeing you when it is safe to return.

*The virus doesn't move. We move the virus.*

With concern for you and yours,

**Jennifer Sargent Desmond, MSN, FNP-C, MFA**

*Public Health Officer, Town of Vinalhaven*

*Clinical Director, Islands Community Medical Center*



Islands Community  
Medical Services

*Our Medical Center*

## Vinalhaven, Maine: Caring, Responsible Community or Vigilante Town?

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**VINALHAVEN, Maine–March 30, 2020** – As many Vinalhaven residents 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. Vinalhaven’s Public Health Team convened and called on the town to begin the practice of social distancing, and requested those returnees self quarantine for fourteen days. The returnees complied with the request.

The town 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 hard to meet the needs of citizens.

#### **On just the subject of food:**

- The school makes breakfast and lunch for children and delivers to their homes
- Local organizations and churches deliver meals to seniors and others who request them
- The grocery store, which is closed to public access, fills phone or internet orders. These orders are picked up at the door or, upon request, are delivered to homes
- One person started a pay it forward fund at the grocery store to help folks who can’t pay for their food; others continue to add to that fund

And as the anxiety and loneliness of social distancing build up, 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. The island has a 24-7 FQHC (Federally Qualified Health Center) 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 professionals 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.