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Eastern Aleutian Tribes vaccinate communities and seafood industry workers

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska – The Eastern Aleutian Tribes health organization has received an allocation of COVID-19 vaccine from the federal government, which they will use to vaccinate seafood industry workers and community members in Dutch Harbor/Unalaska and other Aleutian communities. On March 17, residents of Akutan and seafood industry workers from land-based processing plants and vessels were vaccinated. On March 18, eight vessels received vaccinations in Unalaska/Dutch Harbor, and a community event vaccinated shore-based seafood workers.

Eastern Aleutian Tribes received additional vaccine through a program for Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC). The tribe is eligible to receive vaccine for community distribution. Over the course of two days, more than 2,500 doses of COVID-19 vaccine were administered with plans for additional vaccinations to take place in the weeks to follow.

Each year tens of thousands of people travel from around the world to work in Alaska's fishing industry. During the fishing season these workers are members of the community. Eastern Aleutian Tribes, the City of Unalaska, Iliuliuk Family & Health Services Clinic, and the Alaska COVID-19 Unified Command, and others partnered to coordinate the delivery of vaccine to some of the most remote communities in Alaska.

"The best way to protect Alaskans from COVID-19 is to get shots into as many arms as possible. The partnerships we forged really shined, allowing us to move very quickly to vaccinate every person in our communities that wanted to be vaccinated," said Paul Mueller, CEO of Eastern Aleutian Tribes. "We knew we had this vaccine coming, we prepared as a team, and at the end of the day we are really proud that we could use this vaccine allotment as effectively as we did."

Coupled with existing social distancing measures, vaccinating seafood industry workers will reduce the risk of COVID-19 having severe health outcomes in remote Alaskan communities who have limited health care capacity.

"The commercial fishing industry is the lifeblood of many Alaskan communities and it's critical they are able to continue their work. The challenge is balancing the economic needs with the health needs of the communities and the workforce," said Bryan Fisher, Incident Commander with the Unified Command. "I want to thank Eastern Aleutian Tribes for their partnership throughout the entire pandemic. While we saw outbreaks among seafood industry workers last year, we did not see transmission to community members, and we had plans in place to provide health care to seafood workers who were exposed to COVID-19."

The state continues to take steps to ensure that private businesses, including the commercial fishing industry, can keep operating during the COVID-19 pandemic and that Alaska remains open for business.

Employers who use out-of-state employees are strongly recommended to submit Community/Workforce Protective Plans, implement social distancing measures to protect workers and communities, and conduct regular testing and screening.

Details about developing Community/Workforce Protective Plans are available within Health Advisory No. 4: Critical Infrastructure documents found at: <https://covid19.alaska.gov/health-advisories/>

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