

Alaska News

# State will lift mandatory quarantine for travelers, instead requiring they be tested before flying to Alaska

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*A sign gives travelers from out-of-state instructions to fill out a declaration online at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport on May 11, 2020. (Marc Lester / ADN archive)*

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Alaska is revising its policy for incoming travelers, soon requiring that they be tested for COVID-19 before boarding a plane to the state instead of quarantining for 14 days upon arrival, Gov. Mike Dunleavy announced Friday evening.

Dunleavy said in a media briefing Friday that travelers from out of state, who will need to be tested for COVID-19 within 72 hours of boarding a plane to Alaska, will be asked to provide test results and fill out paperwork when they arrive.

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Those who are unable to submit their complete paperwork — for example, if they lost their paperwork or test results while

traveling — will be provided a test at airport terminals upon arrival, Dunleavy said. Instead of being tested at the airport, travelers may opt instead for a 14-day quarantine, Dunleavy added.

"We do believe that this will open up Alaska more to travel coming to Alaska, which is going to help folks come see Alaska, help our local businesses get some of the business back that we've lost, but also test people because that's been one of the big things we've all talked nationwide," Dunleavy said.

Travelers will meet with Alaska Department of Health and Social Services contractors at the airport terminal who will take their test paperwork, Dunleavy said.

"If you test before you depart for Alaska, you're going to know what your test results are," Dunleavy said.

Health officials will work with anyone who tests positive at an airport terminal. Those individuals may need to isolate or

take other measures to prevent the spread of the virus, Dunleavy said.

“If you test negative, you’ll go on and enjoy your trip,” Dunleavy said. “If you test positive, we’ll work with you on how we can deal with your health issue.”

Regarding overland travel from Canada or ferry travel, Dunleavy said that state officials next week will discuss with different agencies and jurisdictions what kind of protocols may need to be in place.

The state will provide more details on the policy changes Monday, he said.

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*[He tested positive for the coronavirus. One day later, a federal prison flew him home to Alaska.]*

Under a health mandate set to expire the night of June 2, the state requires that everyone who enters Alaska quarantine for 14 days when they arrive. The policy has been in place since

late March. Incoming travelers must go straight to a quarantine location and stay there for two weeks, except for emergencies or to seek medical care.

That policy will now end on June 5, replaced by the new testing requirement, Dunleavy said. As of Saturday morning, the [state's health mandate](#) on interstate travel had not been updated online to reflect the changes.

“We’re going to try to make this as easy as possible but still have some significant safeguards for you as the traveler, for the folks on the plane and for Alaskans when you come here,” Dunleavy said.

DHSS contractors will be at any Alaska airport where flights arrive from the Lower 48, the governor said, including Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Sitka, Ketchikan, Wrangell and Petersburg.

Dunleavy said the state will “strongly, strongly encourage” travelers to be tested before they come to Alaska “because if they come off the plane without a test, it may take a while for them to leave the terminal before they’re tested and we get

the results. So, it's going to be more of an inconvenience just because of the nature of the test and the time it takes for the test to determine if one is negative or positive.”

Prerequisites for getting a COVID-19 test vary widely among states and local communities. While some places have testing available for anyone who wants it, in other areas, someone might need to have a doctor's referral or be showing symptoms of the illness before they can be tested.

On Saturday, Alaska's health department reported that four more residents had tested positive for COVID-19, along with one nonresident. In total, 434 Alaskans and 19 nonresidents in the state have tested positive. Ten Alaskans with COVID-19 have died.

Under the new policy for travelers, some small communities with limited health care infrastructure may still restrict incoming non-essential travel, Dunleavy said.

The state is planning a “robust public relations campaign” regarding the new rules, Dunleavy said, and the state has been working with several airlines on the new changes.

Carolyn Hall, spokeswoman for Anchorage Mayor Ethan Berkowitz, said Friday evening that the administration wanted to fully analyze the state's new travel policy before commenting on it.

Earlier Friday, Berkowitz said he was waiting to see what Dunleavy would announce about the interstate travel health mandate before deciding what to do.

"I am not planning on anything right now," Berkowitz said. "We are going to wait and see what the state is going to do."

Berkowitz said he could continue a mandatory 14-day quarantine for people entering Anchorage from outside the state, similar to [what Dillingham has in place](#). But he said he urged the state to implement a screening procedure at the airport, which would influence his decision.

"The economics will be disastrous if there is a public health outbreak," Berkowitz said.

