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—ALASKA NATIONAL GUARD—

1. Refilling the life supply: Alaska National Guard and Blood Bank of Alaska hold blood drive at AKNG armory

DVIDS by Sgt. Seth LaCount/May 27

More than 30 Alaska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, Alaska State Defense Force Soldiers, and other DMVA personnel volunteered to give blood at the National Guard Armory here yesterday in coordination with the Blood Bank of Alaska.

The blood drive was led by Lt. Col. Joseph Gerace, the 49th Brigade, Medical Detachment Commander of the ASDF, under the direction of the adjutant general of Alaska Maj. Gen Torrence Saxe.

Gerace has been on state active duty orders since March and has worked as part of the medical section for Joint Task Force-Alaska in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Although this state is one of the least affected by the virus overall, I think we've been highly prepared and dialed in to respond to whatever comes our way," Gerace said. "Drives like this are part of that."

Donors were met on the open drill hall floor of the armory by workers from the Blood Bank, before signing various medical questionnaires and taking their seats to donate.

"I'm impressed by everyone's willingness to give back to their community during such a critical time of need," said Gerace. "I expected that the Tuesday after Memorial Day would be a tough day to get volunteers. But all these folks stepped up, and we met our goal."

Donating blood products is essential to community health and the need for blood, plasma, and platelets is constant as part of our nation's critical infrastructure, according to the American Red Cross. Blood drives like this can maintain and secure adequate supplies for blood transfusions for patients throughout Alaska.

After each volunteer finished donating, Gerace gave them each a box of Girl Scout Cookies from the Girl Scouts of Alaska as a small token of appreciation. And the sweet choices were plentiful. As part of an individual effort to relieve some of the financial strain on the local economy and support the Girl Scouts, Gerace spent his entire stimulus check on Girl Scout cookies, and said he was happy to share the treats with the men and women who he's proud to serve alongside.

Link: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/370862/refilling-life-supply-alaska-national-guard-and-blood-bank-alaska-hold-blood-drive-akng-armory>

2. Mayor says no Memorial Day ceremony this year, but citizens respond: 'We'll do it without you' *Must Read Alaska by Suzanne Downing/May 24*

AKNG Excerpt:

Lt. Gen. Craig Campbell, (ret.), of the Alaska National Guard, will give the keynote address. He is also a former commissioner of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and former lieutenant governor.

Link: <https://mustreadalaska.com/mayor-says-no-memorial-day-ceremony-this-year-but-citizens-respond-well-do-it/>

3. Inside the Gates: Military Youth Academy cadets adapt to online learning *KTVB by Scott Gross/May 22*

Alaska Military Youth Academy cadets were sent home due to restrictions surrounding the pandemic a month and a half into their 22-week stay at Camp Carroll on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Cadets left the campus on what is now the longest home pass in AMYA history. Staff members that were accustomed to face-to-face opportunities now use a different arsenal of tools to make sure the cadets stay on task.

"[It's] the difficulty of motivating somebody without actually standing in front of them," AMYA director David McPhetres said. "As you see, the cadets that are here have to be self-motivated and so they are demonstrating a lot of that."

For some of the cadets, a return home presented additional hardships as some of their parents were laid off. McPhetres says the academy continues to provide meals to the cadets as well as their families off-campus.

"It's a little bit of a mix," McPhetres said. "In the Mat-Su Valley, we have several homes that we deliver meals to. In the Anchorage area we started with Muldoon [...] where cadets picked up. Then we also realized that several of the cadets didn't have transportation or their families were high risk and worried about going out. We started taking meals out to them."

The academy provides youth with 17 months of mentoring where they can earn academic credits which they can take back to their high schools. It's an opportunity to catch up in order to graduate with their class on time. Cadets can graduate with either a GED or accredited diploma from the academy.

AMYA is optimistic they can bring the cadets back on campus, perhaps as soon as June 2.

"I wanted to let each of you know that we are in fact ready to bring you back on campus," deputy director Naomi Sweetman told the cadets on a May 22 Zoom call. "So, we have a plan in place. It will be very methodical, very much like returning your homework. We'll bring you back one platoon at a time and we'll do it over the course of three days."

The academy is still waiting for the green light to return. The program doesn't fall under the Department of Education and Early Development for funding or policy and the AMYA campus is well secluded, which helps their chances of opening.

Graduation is set for July 10.

Link: <https://www.ktva.com/story/42165808/inside-the-gates-military-youth-academy-cadets-asked-to-self-motivate-with-away-from-campus>

4. Wings and Blades of Hope

Pacom.mil by Capt. David Bedard/May 21

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- In the case of the HH-60 Pave Hawk and HC-130J Combat King II combat search and rescue aircraft, the first "H" stands for "help."

Both machines and crews, of the Alaska Air National Guard's 210th and 212th rescue squadrons respectively, provide that help by training every day for their combat mission of going behind enemy lines and inserting pararescuemen (PJs) to rescue downed pilots and other isolated allied troops.

At home station, the crews partner with PJs of the 212th Rescue Squadron to provide civil search and rescue statewide.

It was only appropriate then that the 176th Wing Airmen of the three rescue squadrons went a little out of their way May 13 to fly low and slow over Eagle River, Palmer and Wasilla near JBER.

Later, aircraft from U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard units in Alaska honored frontline COVID-19 responders and essential workers with flights over 23 communities in the state May 15.

The Salute to Alaska flyovers, allowed as part of an approved training mission, are part of the Air Force Salutes initiative designed to show appreciation to the heroes around the world battling the pandemic, and to lift morale in communities across America.

Participating JBER aircraft during the week included the C-17 Globemaster III, F-22 Raptor, HC-130 and

HH-60. Participating Eielson Air Force Base aircraft were the F-16 Fighting Falcon, F-35 Lightning II, and KC-135 Stratotanker.

The flyovers were a collaborative salute to healthcare workers, first responders, and other essential personnel to showcase solidarity with all of Alaska during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the May 13 sortie, both aircraft went their separate ways to carry out unique training profiles before meeting again to accomplish the community flyover.

Alaska Air National Guard Lt. Col. Jeremy Groat, 210th RQS commander, said he wanted to expose Maj. Ryan Wiese to Alaska airspace.

An experienced command pilot who just came from the elite U.S. Air Force Weapons School at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, Groat said Wiese nonetheless needed to build familiarity with Alaska's unique weather and terrain.

To accomplish their goal, Groat guided the Pave Hawk to the ascending and plunging Chugach Mountains, still covered in snow and ice from last winter. The cement-gray helicopter appeared like a mosquito against the backdrop of a refrigerator as the crew expertly navigated the folds and contours of the terrain.

"We wanted to get Major Wiese out to the mountainous and snow-covered glacier fields east of JBER," Groat said. "We completed glacier landings and complex hovers."

Miles away, Capt. Christopher Brunner, 211th RQS rescue pilot, and his crew were focused on a completely different set of tasks.

Beginning over JBER's Malemute Drop Zone, the HC-130's loadmasters kicked out container delivery systems, which safely delivered supplies and equipment under the canopy of parachutes.

The pilots then pulled on the yoke, bringing the aircraft to 10,000 feet. In the whisper-thin air, PJs stepped into the summery void, falling thousands of feet before pulling their parachute releases, precisely gliding to a simulated isolated survivor.

Finally, the two aircraft rendezvoused across the frigid, restless ocean water at Mount Susitna, where they would undertake a synchronized waltz at altitude when the HC-130's refueling boom delivered fuel midair to the thirsty whirlybird.

The airborne duo speared east and north on their route to show the Alaska Air National Guard's colors to communities slowly emerging from lockdown.

Though they soared above migrating geese and nesting eagles, they said they still felt a connection to the community.

"I saw some people waving; some people taking pictures," Brunner recalled. "I ended up getting some pictures sent to me directly saying how cool it was."

"It was a good way to show the community as a whole that this is the piece we can do to show solidarity

and our support of the community at large as well as first responders and hospital workers,” Groat said.

While they were tracking along the goodwill route, Brunner said he could hear approving chatter from pilots passing through the area.

“From the sky to the ground, it seemed like there were a lot of excited people,” he said. “I thought it was awesome. It’s good to go out there and show the military still has a presence in Alaska. We’re here to assist in any way we can, including defending our country.”

Link: <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2195040/wings-and-blades-of-hope/>

5. National Guard Fly-By

Wrangell Sentinel by Caleb Vierkant/May 21

As a way of saying "thank you" to medical professionals, first responders, and teachers for all their work during the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Guard flew over several Alaskan communities on Friday, May 15. Pictured here is one of two C-17's that flew past Wrangell's city dock that afternoon.

Link: <https://www.wrangellsentinel.com/story/2020/05/21/about-town/national-guard-fly-by/7619.html>

6. Alaska National Guard Soldiers deploy to Poland for NATO sustainment mission

The Delta Discovery by Sgt. Seth LaCount/May 20

More than 80 Soldiers assigned to the Alaska Army National Guard’s 297th Regional Support Group departed from Ted Steven International’s Kulis airfield on May 13 for a deployment to Poland in order to provide support for U.S. Army Europe’s Atlantic Resolve mission.

Since April 2014, U.S. Army Europe has led the Department of Defense’s Atlantic Resolve land efforts by bringing units based in the U.S. to Europe for nine months at a time, according to U.S. Army Europe’s website.

Atlantic Resolve provides these rotational units with the ability to build readiness, increase interoperability, and enhance the bond between ally and partner militaries through multinational training events.

“This is going to be the first time our unit has supported an Army services component command for a geographic combatant commander,” said Alaska Army National Guard Col. Matthew Schell, commander of the 297th RSG. “When we are deployed, we will all learn how our job fits into an Army service component command and I think that our Soldiers will learn a lot about fine-tuning their leadership and professional skills in a joint environment.”

There are three types of Atlantic Resolve rotations: armored, aviation or sustainment task force. These rotations are overseen by the U.S. Army’s 1st Infantry Division, a regionally aligned headquarters based in Poznan, Poland.

While in Poland, the 297th RSG will provide the essential sustainment functions for the rotational forces that are training there. This will include base operations support across Poland where they will provide facilities management assistance for dining, lodging, gymnasium and laundry amenities.

According to their website, U.S. Army Europe is working closely with U.S. military and host nation officials to respond to the COVID-19 situation and keep personnel informed. The health and well-being of all Soldiers, civilians and family members are top priority and critical to mission readiness.

“We know that the COVID-19 pandemic is going to change the way we react with each other and the Polish Army during our deployment,” Schell said. “We will continue to look out for the safety of our Soldiers through social distancing, masks and hand washing”.

There are approximately 6,000 Soldiers participating in Atlantic Resolve at any given time, conducting operations and exercises across 17 countries.

Deployments of ready, combat-credible U.S. forces to Europe in support of Atlantic Resolve is evidence of the strong and unrelenting U.S. commitment to NATO and Europe, according to U.S. Army Europe.

Link: <https://deltadiscovery.com/alaska-national-guard-soldiers-deploy-to-poland-for-nato-sustainment-mission/>

— NOVEL CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 IN ALASKA—

7. Two new cases of COVID-19 reported in seafood workers alongside two resident cases

KTUU by Cheyenne Mathews/May 26

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (KTUU) - The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services is reporting two new cases of COVID-19 in Alaskan communities along with two new nonresident cases in the seafood industry. The nonresident cases are not included in the state's coronavirus response hub data so the state is reporting 411 total cases in Alaska.

The nonresident cases were reported in Anchorage. So far there have been 17 nonresident cases reported in the state and a majority of those are workers in the seafood industry with 12 total cases.

The two new community cases were in Anchorage and in Sitka. This is Sitka's second reported case and was in an asymptomatic individual, according to a statement from the City of Sitka.

Both of the cases identified Tuesday are female; one is age 20-29 and the other is 30-39.

A total of 362 people have recovered from the virus and 10 have died. DHSS reports there are 39 active cases in Alaska residents.

The Office of the Governor is holding its second virtual Town Hall meeting Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. The town hall will feature a panel of medical professionals in the state as they answer questions about the science and data behind COVID-19. It will be livestreamed on Channel 2's website and Facebook at 5:30 p.m.

Link: <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/Two-new-cases-of-COVID-19-reported-in-seafood-workers-alongside-two-resident-cases-570784871.html>

8. 6 tips from Alaska medical experts about minimizing your risk as the state reopens

KTOO by Tegan Hanlon, Alaska's Energy Desk/May 26

Alaska is reopening.

Gov. Mike Dunleavy has removed state restrictions for businesses, and is allowing for larger groups. Anchorage Mayor Ethan Berkowitz has also lifted local capacity limits on businesses in the state's largest city.

Dunleavy and Berkowitz have cited a low number of coronavirus cases and increased healthcare capacity as some of the reasons to open back up.

But, even though the state has one the country's lowest rates of infection per capita, the virus is still here and Alaskans should make plans for how to re-enter social settings based on their individual circumstances, doctors say.

There are no easy answers. And there's no playbook. But, medical experts do have tips for what Alaskans should consider as the state reopens:

1. Think of the coronavirus as the bear in the woods — seriously.

Dr. Tom Hennessy has a very Alaska analogy to explain how people can think about the coronavirus: "It's like you're taking a walk in the woods, and just because you don't see a bear, doesn't mean the bear isn't there," he said. "And the bear, in this case, is the coronavirus, and it's out there. So we need to be aware of that and take precaution."

Hennessy is an infectious disease epidemiologist and affiliate faculty member at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

When Alaskans go hiking, he said, they know they may run into a bear, so they prepare: Carrying bear spray or a firearm, making noise and traveling in groups. Now, Alaskans leaving their homes need to be prepared for the lurking coronavirus — which is harder to see than a bear and can spread silently.

"We are not in a risk-free environment. The virus hasn't gone away. It's still out there. There are still people walking among us who are infected with it and are transmitting to other people," Hennessy said. "So it would be foolish for people to assume we could just go back to the way life was before this virus visited us... The bear is still in the woods."

2. Age and underlying medical conditions are key considerations.

Alaskans should consider their own health risks, plus the risks of those they see often.

"We're entering a phase where people really need to individually assess their own personal risk and the risk of others they come in close contact with," said Dr. Michelle Rothoff, a medical epidemiologist at the state Department of Health and Social Services.

People age 65 and over are at a higher risk of developing severe illness from the coronavirus, and of dying from the disease. Those with underlying medical conditions like serious heart problems and lung disease are too.

So, if that's you or someone you live with or see regularly, then you should be "extremely, extremely careful" about who you're interacting with, Hennessy said.

“If that healthy person brings the infection home to their vulnerable family member, they could cause a catastrophic illness,” he said.

3. Start small.

The basic rule is: The more different people that you’re exposed to, the higher your potential risk is, Rothoff said.

As Alaskans start to regrow their social circles, they should consider expanding slowly, she said.

“Start by maybe incorporating a few additional friends or family members outside of the immediate household that are kind of consistent,” she said.

That way, everyone also knows what precautions the others in the group are taking.

And, consider how long you’re around other people and where you are. Outdoors is generally better than indoors. There’s more air flow, Rothoff said. But, if you’re spending all evening outside in a large group, your risk rises.

4. Do your research.

Before you go to a restaurant, bar, hair salon, gym or other business, research what new protocols the owners have put in place in response to the pandemic, Hennessy said.

Look online. Or call ahead. Then, decide if you’re comfortable with the measures.

“If a business decides to take the reopening of the economy and just pack people into their restaurant or bar, without any concern for these social-distancing measures, that would be a really high-risk setting compared to a restaurant where they appropriately space the tables, where the waitstaff are wearing masks, where there’s hand-washing facilities easily available to customers,” Hennessy said.

Hennessy said he’d feel much more comfortable going to a business following social-distancing guidelines, and where employees are wearing masks.

Other questions to consider: How long are you spending in the business? How many others will be there, and in how big of a space?

5. Masks are still a good idea.

Masks that cover your nose and mouth help keep large droplets from spraying out when you cough or sneeze or even talk loudly, said Dr. Michael Bernstein, regional chief medical officer for Providence Health and Services Alaska.

Wearing a mask is particularly important with the coronavirus because people can be very infectious while not showing symptoms, Bernstein said. While Bernstein doesn’t wear a mask when walking his dog in empty areas, he said, he does generally wear one otherwise.

“It’s not that hard,” he said. “I don’t feel like I’m, you know, being restricted terribly. I think anything I can do to help reduce that transmission, I should.”

Hennessy put it another way: "The masks that we wear in public — at the grocery store or in a crowded location — are really for us to protect other people. And so not wearing a mask is kind of a statement that you don't really care about other people."

6. It's not time to let your guard down: Social distancing and handwashing are still critical.

Rothoff said she really wants to emphasize that even though businesses are opening back up, keeping a distance from others is critical so coronavirus cases don't spike.

She pointed to a graphic that shows if Alaskans decrease their social exposure by 75%, one infected person leads to about three other infections in 30 days. If no one follows social distancing, that one infection leads to more than 400 others with the virus in the same time period.

"So social distancing is really important," Rothoff said.

So is washing your hands, she said. And not touching your face.

The goal is to keep the number of coronavirus cases manageable, Hennessy said. With restrictions lifting, he said, it's now up to Alaskans.

"The governor has turned it back to the people of Alaska and said, 'It's up to you. You've learned about this. We expect you to act responsibly,'" Hennessy said. "So it will be a test for all of us to see if we just throw caution to the wind... or if Alaskans will take the measures they've learned and continue to apply them."

Link: <https://www.ktuu.org/2020/05/26/6-tips-from-alaska-medical-experts-about-minimizing-your-risk-as-the-state-reopens/>

9. Researchers say Alaska's post-covid oil outlook depends on the next few weeks

KTUU by Hank Davis/May 26

ANCHORAGE (KTUU) - Since reaching 15,000 jobs in 2014, Alaska's oil industry has experienced consecutive years of workforce shrinkage - falling to as low as 9,100 jobs. In 2019, that changed. Over the last year, the state's number of oil workers saw a small growth for the first time in years, but that all changed in March, when COVID-19 brought the global oil demand to a crushing low.

Mouchine Guetabbi is an economist at UAA's Institute of Social and Economic Research. He says that since the pandemic began, Alaska has lost 10% of its oil jobs. In order to determine how long it might take for that sector of the economy to fully recover, Guetabbi says researchers will be paying close attention to the data during the next 5-8 weeks. He says three key things will indicate how long it might take for the economy to bounce back:

"Are people comfortable going out to restaurants and crowded businesses ... How many small businesses will make it ... and how many of those businesses that do make will call back their employees?" Guetabbi told KTUU. "These three things will tell us basically everything we need to know about what kind of disruption we are talking about."

The Alaska Department of Labor's Chief of Research and Analysis, Dan Robinson tells KTUU that it will also take some time for the data to paint an accurate picture of what the oil market might look like in the future.

"The big questions will be about whether all of the drilling, and the new drilling and the stuff that we were sure was going to happen at the beginning of the year ... whether and when, that will all come back," he said.

Last month's numbers are the latest to be recorded by the Department of Labor and show that right now, there are about 8,900 oil workers in Alaska. Before the pandemic, there were about 10,500 jobs related to the state's oil industry.

Link: <https://www.ktuu.com/content/news/Researchers-say-Alaskas-post-covid-oil-outlook-570789611.html>

— NOVEL CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 NATIONAL GUARD NEWS—

10. National Guard COVID-19 Response

Washington Guard partners with Quinault Indian Nation; Guard assists state health officials in COVID-19 mapping; Florida Guard supports antibody testing in South Florida

Latest news articles: <https://www.nationalguard.mil/coronavirus/>

11. Push is on to get National Guard troops on coronavirus duty health care help once their missions end

Military Times by Leo Shane III/May 26

With less than a month before orders expire for National Guard troops responding to the coronavirus pandemic, advocates are pushing lawmakers to ensure their health care needs are covered even after the missions are over.

On Tuesday, officials from the National Guard Association of the United States pressed Congress to act quickly on pending legislation that would provide Guardsmen and their families with six months of Tricare coverage after they leave federal Title 32 active duty.

"These soldiers and airmen are on the front lines of our nation's worst public health crisis in more than a century," said retired Brig. Gen. J. Roy Robinson, president of NGAUS, in a statement. "It would be unconscionable to send them home to their families without medical coverage."

Under current law, guardsmen on federal orders for more than 30 days have access to the military's Tricare medical system while on duty. Their families are also covered while their missions are active.

In addition, those troops and dependents receive transitional medical care for six months after an overseas assignments, to help ensure that any post-deployment health issues are handled.

But under current law, domestic missions do not enjoy the same six-month extension.

"Active-component personnel coming off the same front lines have that coverage, and rightly so," Robinson said. "All we are asking is that we treat Guardsmen the same way."

Last week, Reps. Joe Cunningham, D-S.C., and Steven Palazzo, R-Miss., introduced the Support our National Guard Act in the House, which would provide the six-month extended coverage following the coronavirus deployments.

That measure echoes legislation introduced two weeks ago by Sens. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, and Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., that would also extend hazardous duty pay to guardsmen performing the pandemic missions.

About 46,000 Guardsmen are deployed to states across the country to help local authorities with testing and logistics needs related to the outbreak. Nearly 100,000 Americans have died from complications related to the fast-spreading virus in the last three months.

The expected end of the guard missions next month has been a point of controversy in recent weeks, because the timing will leave most Guardsmen one day short of the minimum needed to qualify for certain military retirement and veteran education benefits.

White House officials have not said publicly why they chose the June 24 end date, or whether they plan to extend the missions in coming days.

Link: <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/05/26/push-is-on-to-get-national-guard-troops-on-coronavirus-duty-health-care-help-once-their-missions-end/>

— NOVEL CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 NATIONAL & WORLD—

12. Dr. Anthony Fauci says a second wave of coronavirus is 'not inevitable'

CNBC by Berkeley Lovelace Jr/May 27

A second wave of the coronavirus outbreak in the United States "could happen" but is "not inevitable," White House health advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci said Wednesday.

The U.S. can prevent another wave of Covid-19 as long as states reopen "correctly," Fauci said Wednesday morning in an interview on CNN. "Don't start leapfrogging over the recommendations of some of the guidelines because that's really tempting fate and asking for trouble."

Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and a member of President Donald Trump's coronavirus task force, has previously warned that Americans need to prepare for the possibility of a second wave of the coronavirus in the fall, which would run alongside the flu season.

"We will have coronavirus in the fall," Fauci said in April. "I am convinced of that."

He told The Washington Post this month that he has "no doubt" there will be new waves of cases.

Fauci's comments came days after he told CNBC that stay-at-home orders intended to curb the spread of the coronavirus could end up causing "irreparable damage" if imposed for too long.

"I don't want people to think that any of us feel that staying locked down for a prolonged period of time is the way to go," Fauci said during an interview Friday with CNBC's Meg Tirrell on "Halftime Report."

He said the U.S. had to institute severe measures because Covid-19 cases were exploding then. "But now is the time, depending upon where you are and what your situation is, to begin to seriously look at reopening the economy, reopening the country to try to get back to some degree of normal."

Experts say the U.S. will need an effective drug treatment or vaccine before getting back to "normal." There are no formally approved treatments for Covid-19, which has infected more than 5.6 million people worldwide, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

Fauci said Wednesday that "the lack of efficacy" for anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine, which has been touted by Trump as a game-changer against the coronavirus, is clear.

A study published Friday in medical journal The Lancet found that hospitalized Covid-19 patients treated with hydroxychloroquine had a higher risk of death than those who didn't take it.

Earlier Wednesday, France said it banned the use of the potential treatment. On Monday, the World Health Organization said it temporarily suspended its trial of hydroxychloroquine over safety concerns.
Link: <https://www.cnbc.com/amp/2020/05/27/dr-anthony-fauci-says-a-second-wave-of-coronavirus-is-not-inevitable.html>

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