



Alaska Travel Protocols for Infectious Disease Management

2024 Field Season

The National Science Foundation (NSF) recognizes that in 2024 many infectious diseases can impact fieldwork and the goal for Infectious Disease management is for all operations and research projects to be successful with as little impact from illness as possible. Individuals are responsible for avoiding infection by utilizing the safe behaviors outlined below. Individuals should employ good practices to avoid infection throughout deployment. Infectious disease protocols are subject to change at any time to manage risk in the program.

Researcher Delay, Disruption, or Cancellation Due to COVID-19:

NSF's Arctic Research Support & Logistics (RSL) program will not pay for the costs associated with recovering from illness or injury, including COVID-19, such as hotel, per diem, commercial flights, or other disruptions to research projects. The RSL program will not support makeup field time or additional field seasons due to COVID-19 infections. This is consistent with any illness or injury that befalls a team member. Per the NSF Grant Terms and Conditions, the awardee institution is responsible for the work performed under the grant.

Masking During Travel:

All travelers (including staff, contractors, researchers, students, and official visitors) **should wear high-quality masks** (e.g. KN95) during travel and anytime spaces are crowded. Personnel who test positive or have symptoms of COVID-19 or other respiratory illness may be restricted from performing their duties, which significantly impacts research and operations. To avoid these impacts, everyone is expected to follow the steps outlined below.

COVID-19 Testing Before and During Travel:

Every participant is encouraged to take an antigen test prior to and throughout travel. Test at home and at every layover that requires an overnight stay in a new location. For multi-day travel delays, test once at that location within 12 hours of departure and email a photograph to verify test results (see the full process below). Toolik Field Station requires two tests prior to reaching the field station. The complete [Toolik Field Station COVID-19 Mitigation Plan](#) is available on their website.

Vaccination Requirements:

An updated COVID-19 vaccination containing the omicron variant XBB resistance (September 12, 2023, or newer) is recommended for all Alaska participants and required for Toolik Field Station deployments. As always, travelers must comply with national, state, local, and tribal travel restrictions.

Questions and Clarifications:

All questions and clarifications of this policy should be sent to Greg Huey, the Battelle ARO Health, Safety, and Environment (HSE) Team Lead for COVID-19 coordination, who is trained and certified in confidentiality and HIPAA Compliance (+1 505-670-1878/greg@polarfield.com).

Protected Health Information (PHI), such as COVID-19 test results, should be sent to the [HSE Team Lead](#) and the HIPAA compliant [CU Anschutz](#) mailbox. Encrypted or password protected documents are preferred.

Travel Guidelines and Recommendations:

1. Participants traveling to Toolik Field Station are required to be fully vaccinated at least 14 days prior to departure and all other participants are **encouraged to be fully vaccinated** at least 14 days before departure. Please see [Toolik Field Station COVID-19 Mitigation Plan](#).
2. Practice social distancing 10 days prior to travel.
3. **Purchase and travel with FDA approved at-home antigen test kits:** [FDA Authorized COVID-19 At-Home Tests](#). These and KN95 masks are reimbursable for contractors and an allowable grant cost for researchers.

Many at-home COVID-19 tests listed on the FDA website have shelf lives extended by up to 12-months. Extended dates for each are provided by the manufacturer and the FDA. *Pilot* brand COVID-19 at-home tests have undergone a recall for tests with [specific lot numbers](#).

- Toolik Field Station: purchase 8 tests
 - Field Sites: purchase 4 tests
4. Take an **antigen test** prior to travel. Take a photo of the results. See [Toolik Field Station COVID-19 Mitigation Plan](#) for their specific testing schedule.
 5. For a positive test result, do not travel. Contact your supervisor/project lead and the [HSE Team Lead](#).
 6. Carry all test results and your remaining antigen test kits during travel.
 7. For specific COVID-19 Protocols: [Toolik Field Station protocols](#), [UIC Alaska COVID-19 Mitigation](#). For remote field sites, refer to Alaska Department of Health website for COVID-19 Protocols: [COVID-19 in Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services](#).

Illness while Deployed:

1. For a positive antigen test or presence of a respiratory illness (fever, chills, fatigue, cough, etc.), the individual should immediately isolate and contact their supervisor/project lead, the [HSE Team Lead](#) and [CU Anschutz medical](#). A regular check-in schedule will be established.
2. Medical points of contact for program participants are listed in the table below.
3. **For return to regular activity** (i.e. to continue deployment), follow isolation and masking policies:
 - a. When symptoms are improving and the participant is fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medications, the participant can end isolation.
 - b. For 5 days after ending isolation/resolution of symptoms, the participant should mask when indoors and/or around others and minimize any unmasked time around others including eating alone.
 - c. Refer to the site-specific *Emergency Action Plan* and *Disease Containment Plan* for more information.
 - d. **Upon completion of isolation activities**, contact the [HSE Team Lead](#) and [CU Anschutz medical](#) to confirm clearance for return to regular activity.

Return Travel from Alaska following Infection:

1. For a positive antigen test or presence of a respiratory illness (fever, chills, fatigue, cough, etc.), follow isolation and masking policies of the airline or as previously described. Mask for a minimum of 5 days post isolation. Consult the [CDC website](#) for best practices following any respiratory virus infection.
2. Contact the [HSE Team Lead](#) and [CU Anschutz](#) medical prior to travel.



Medical Support Contact Information

Medical Support	
Consultation regarding non-urgent COVID-19 medical needs	Dr. David Young, Medical Director for Operations david.s.young@cuanschutz.edu Dr. Elaine Reno, Medical Director for Physical Qualifications elaine.reno@cuanschutz.edu CU Anschutz Medical email arcticsupport@cuanschutz.edu
For urgent/emergent medical needs	Telemed support is available 24-hours at +1 844-285-4555 Ask for "Arctic Support"
HSE Team Lead	Greg Huey greg@polarfield.com

CDC updated the COVID-19 "isolation" period on March 1, 2024 and published unified Respiratory Virus Guidance bringing a practical approach to protecting against a range of common respiratory viral illnesses. A summary of the CDC Respiratory Virus Guidance updates may be found [here](#), and references and information from the CDC on Preventing the Spread of Respiratory Viruses can be found [here](#).

As with other illnesses and injuries, researchers are responsible for additional field costs in the event of illness or injury within their project teams. NSF strongly encourages individuals to follow safe behaviors laid out in this protocol throughout deployment to avoid infection and thereby prevent negative impacts due to illness on research projects or operations.