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America's Arctic University

To: Chancellor Daniel White

March 3, 2023

Explanation for requesting to continue our existing COVID vaccine mandate at the Toolik Field Station

Toolik Field Station (TFS) requests the ability to continue our existing vaccine mandate, as articulated in our March 2, 2023 COVID Mitigation Policy, "All travelers to TFS are required to be up-to-date on vaccination against COVID-19 according to CDC guidance, unless they have a vaccine exemption from their institution."

This vaccine mandate is necessary because TFS is a remote research station with no advanced medical facilities. If a resident were to contract a serious case of COVID, advanced medical care would require transit via a >9 hour truck trip, or an expensive medevac life flight. In addition, Toolik Field Station is a rustic location with a shared dining facility, shared lab facilities, and shared dorm rooms, hence it is difficult to segregate residents. While we will use testing and screening to reduce the chance of introducing COVID into the population, the possibility of asymptomatic carriers means there will always be a risk that COVID spreads through the field station. Requiring vaccination minimizes the impact of such an event and reduces the challenges it would pose to research and facility operations. For similar reasons, the Sikuliaq also requires vaccination unless an exemption has been granted (see https://www.sikuliaq.alaska.edu/ops/forms/Covid-19_Chief_Scientist_Responsibilities_v2.pdf).

In accordance with CDC guidance, we believe that a vaccine mandate benefits the health of the entire camp population while minimizing the potential health burden to any individual from contracting COVID in an isolated location with limited medical resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'M. Syndonia Bret-Harte'.

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TOOLIK FIELD STATION COVID-19 MITIGATION POLICY

The following **COVID-19 mitigation policy for travel to Toolik Field Station (TFS)** will remain in effect until stated otherwise by TFS management. This policy was created in accordance with [CDC guidance](#) at the time of writing (January 27, 2023).

1) Vaccinations

All travelers to TFS are required to be up-to-date on vaccination against COVID-19 according to CDC guidance, unless they have a vaccine exemption from their institution.

2) Pre-Travel Guidelines

Those traveling to TFS must comply with the following pre-travel guidance:

- a. Travelers are encouraged to practice social distancing in the ten days preceding their scheduled departure date.
- b. Travelers are required to take two rapid antigen COVID-19 tests at the following intervals and report their results to Toolik Safety:
 - i. One test two days prior to departure
 - ii. One test within 24 hours of departure
- c. Individuals may travel to TFS if both test results are negative. If an individual tests positive, they will be permitted to travel to TFS on a later date, when they meet the clearance conditions described in *5.0 Procedure for Positive Test Results*.
- d. Travelers will be asked the following questions prior to transport:
 - i. In the past 48 hours, have you experienced symptoms consistent with COVID-19? Symptoms include:
 - Fever or chills
 - New or unexplained onset of cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing
 - New or unexplained loss of taste or smell
 - New or unexplained muscle aches
 - ii. In the past 10 days, have you been exposed to someone who had or was suspected to have COVID-19?
- e. Travelers who answer yes to either question will be evaluated by the TFS Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) on a case by case basis. These travelers may be unable to travel to TFS on their scheduled date of departure.
- f. Projects are responsible for providing lodging in Fairbanks for any team member that encounters COVID-related travel delays.
- g. Projects and/or traveling individuals are responsible for providing all rapid antigen tests for their trip to TFS, as well as a minimum of four N95 or KN95 masks. In addition to the two pre-departure rapid antigen tests, all travelers need four tests (two for testing during the first week, two as a reserve in case of exposure) when at TFS. Projects must therefore supply a minimum of six COVID-19 rapid antigen tests per team member per

trip to TFS to comply with the TFS testing regimen. Rapid antigen tests are an allowable NSF grant expense.

3) Post-Arrival Guidelines

Station residents must abide by the following COVID-19 mitigation precautions upon arrival:

- a. Self-monitor for COVID-like symptoms daily and immediately report any abnormalities to the on-site EMT or Station Manager.
- b. New arrivals are strongly encouraged to
 - i. Wear an N95 or KN95 mask indoors for their first seven days at TFS.
 - ii. Eat separately for their first seven days at TFS.
- c. New arrivals are required to take two additional rapid antigen COVID-19 tests at the following intervals after arriving to the station, and to report their results to Toolik Safety:
 - i. One test five days after arrival
 - ii. One test seven days after arrival
- d. If a new arrival tests positive, they must observe the requirements described in *5.0 Procedure for Positive Test Results*.

4) Guidelines for Symptomatic Individuals & Roommates

Station residents who exhibit COVID-like symptoms are required to self-report to the on-site EMT and observe the following requirements:

- a. Take two rapid antigen COVID-19 tests spaced 48 hours apart.
 - i. If either test is positive for COVID, the resident will be relocated to a sick bay and must observe the requirements described in *5.0 Procedure for Positive Test Results*.
- b. Self-isolate in a single occupancy room.
 - i. The symptomatic individual will be moved into an empty sick bay if they are sharing a room with another camp resident.
 - ii. If there are no empty sick bays, an attempt will be made to relocate the symptomatic individual to a single occupancy room until they have cleared testing.

Additionally, any roommate (Person A) of a symptomatic resident (Person B) must:

- c. Self-isolate in their room until one of the following conditions is met:
 - i. The symptomatic resident (Person B) tests negative on both of their rapid antigen tests.
 - ii. If the symptomatic individual (Person B) tests positive, the roommate (Person A) must remain in isolation for seven days and test negative on two rapid antigen tests scheduled five and seven days following the initial symptom report.
- d. Wear an N95 or KN95 while indoors for 10 full days following initial symptom discovery.¹

- e. Persons who test positive must follow the procedures described in *5.0 Procedure for Positive Test Results*.

5) Guidelines for Positive Test Results

A station resident who tests positive for COVID-19 must:

- a. Isolate in a sick bay for seven days and test every 48 hours starting five days after initial positive test.
 - i. Residents in isolation are not permitted to enter any other buildings except for designated shower and bathroom facilities. Outdoor access will be restricted to isolated locations to eliminate interaction with other camp residents.
- b. Wear an N95 or KN95 mask when leaving their room.
- c. Dine in isolation. Station staff will deliver three meals a day to residents in isolation.
- d. The individual will be permitted to leave isolation when:²
 - i. They test negative on sequential rapid antigen tests taken 48 hours apart.
 - ii. They have no symptoms consistent with active illness for at least 24 hours (continued loss of smell/taste or a lingering cough or mild fatigue will not extend the isolation period).
- e. The on-site EMT will manage COVID-positive residents. TFS will maintain a supply of Paxlovid as a treatment option for station residents that meet the administration criteria set forth by the TFS physician sponsor. Those with severe, life-threatening symptoms, as determined by the EMT on duty in consultation with medical direction, will be immediately sent out of TFS via medevac.

6) Mitigating outbreaks at TFS

- a. A minimum of 12 beds will be reserved for use as a sick bay to house individuals in isolation. These beds will not be used for regular reservations and must remain empty except to accommodate those who have tested positive for COVID-19 while at TFS.
- b. If four or more people test positive and are in isolation at the same time³, all station residents must wear an N95 or KN95 mask indoors for 10 days and undergo testing after five days.
- c. TFS will notify upcoming arrivals about potential outbreaks and may defer new arrivals into the station if 10% of the on-site population is confirmed to have COVID-19.
 - i. Projects are responsible for funding accommodations for COVID-related travel delays.
- d. Ground transportation to Fairbanks or Prudhoe may be limited. Those wishing to exit the station as a result of an outbreak will be triaged and transported based on their health status.

7) References

- 1) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *What to Do If You Were Exposed to COVID-19*. Updated August 24, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/if-you-were-exposed.html>

- 2) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Isolation and Precautions for People With COVID-19*. Updated August 11, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html>
- 3) Four active cases of COVID-19 creates a scenario in which the sick bay could quickly reach capacity, should each individual have spread the infection to two others. At this point the implementation of indoor masking and testing is considered justified to prevent an outbreak that could exceed available space at TFS for isolation.

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Syndonia Bret-Harte, PI, Toolik Field Station

March 8, 2023
Date

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Diane O'Brien, Interim Director, IAB

March 8, 2023
Date

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Nettie La Belle-Hamer, Vice Chancellor for Research

March 11, 2023
Date

DocuSigned by:
Daniel M. White
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Daniel White, Chancellor

March 13, 2023
Date