

# Alaska gets work requirement waiver for food stamps

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JUNEAU, Alaska - Alaska received a statewide waiver from work requirements for food stamp recipients, the state health commissioner said Wednesday, as new coronavirus cases in Alaska also were announced.

Commissioner Adam Crum told reporters the waiver would help give food security to those who are eligible and would be in place during “the duration of this response.”

Gov. Mike Dunleavy last week declared a public health disaster emergency as part of the state’s COVID-19 response preparations. During a Wednesday afternoon news conference, Dr. Anne Zink, the state’s chief medical officer, announced three new cases of the virus that she said were travel related.

Zink said this is an important time for the state. “This is kind of our tipping point. The better we can do this now, the better off we’re all going to be,” she said. Zink has stressed social distancing, regular hand washing, staying home if one is sick and following other health guidelines.

Dunleavy’s administration issued a health mandate Tuesday saying individuals who have travelled to areas with broad community spread of the virus within the past 14 days — such as China and many European countries — should upon their return stay home, avoid contact with household members and not go to work or school until the 14-day period from the time they left the area is up.

Dunleavy also ordered dine-in service at restaurants, breweries and bars be closed until 5 p.m. April 1, along with facilities such as gyms, theatres and bowling alleys. Delivery and drive-thru services are allowed. Places like grocery stores, food pantries and pharmacies will remain open.

Shawnda O’Brien, director of the Division of Public Assistance, said the state has been working with federal officials to find ways to relax some requirements for public assistance programs amid the coronavirus concerns, including work requirements under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which is also known as food stamps.

“Our teams are working on implementation for all recipients of the SNAP program for the duration of the state’s efforts in dealing with the effects of the virus,” O’Brien said by email.