

State of Alaska

Department of Health & Social Services

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New Fairbanks Virology Lab to Continue Vital Testing

Details:

- The State Public Health Laboratories tested 75,086 specimens in FY04, of which 36,267 (48%) specimens were tested in the Fairbanks Virology Laboratory.
- Virology testing will cost the state \$991,000 in GF for the current fiscal year, yet provides nearly \$2 million worth of services.
- The Alaska State Virology Laboratory (ASVL) tests specimens from human and some animal sources for infectious diseases caused by viruses. Examples include rabies, influenza, SARS, West Nile Virus, Norovirus, hepatitis, HIV, measles, mumps and rubella.
- The safe and efficient operation of a State Virology Laboratory is vital to the detection, treatment and control of highly infectious and serious diseases in Alaska. Additionally, the Laboratory is a member of the Pacific Basin Respiratory Research Group and the World Health Organization (WHO) Influenza Centers of the Americas, providing vital information for the yearly make-up of the influenza vaccines.

History:

- The Fairbanks lab has been on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus since 1967. It currently occupies 5,255 square feet in a Cold War-era building.
- An independent assessment by the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted:
 - “The physical facility at the ASVL is marginally adequate considering the importance of the virology testing being conducted. Not only are there severe space limitations, the physical plant itself is inadequate to deliver the necessary bio-safety containment processes and facilities necessary for virological testing.”
- The State Public Health Laboratory in Anchorage was built in 1999 and lacks the space and physical infrastructure to absorb the services provided by the Fairbanks lab. The Anchorage facility provides testing for diseases caused by bacteria, fungi, tuberculosis and parasites, as well as analytical chemistry services for clinical diagnostics, forensic toxicology and biomonitoring. When the new Anchorage lab opened there was room for expansion, but that has been consumed by the growth in bioterrorism prevention and identification missions.

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- The Anchorage laboratory is the only Biological Safety Level (BSL) 3+ facility in Alaska and thus serves as the central analytical agency for state and federal biological and chemical terrorism response.
- Routine virology functions plus changes in technology and emergence of new viral agents were always anticipated to require more space than what is available in Anchorage. Heightened concerns of environmental and food contaminants and new responsibilities associated with terrorism and homeland security have further changed requirements for the Anchorage laboratory.

FY06 Proposal:

- The Department has made a \$24.2 million capital budget request to replace the existing virology lab on the UAF campus.
- Replacement of the facility will ensure the citizens of Alaska continued, safe and high-quality virology laboratory services.
- Co-location of the Alaska State Virology Laboratory on the UAF campus will result in increased collaboration and scientific expertise of both academic researchers and public health practice. The developing human and genetics missions of UAF provide a natural fit for a state public health lab located on the same campus (this mission emphasis of UAF is new in recent years).
- Keeping two separate state labs will give the state surge capacity and redundancy in case the facility in either Fairbanks or Anchorage is damaged in an earthquake.
- Replacement in Fairbanks keeps the highly skilled workforce in place. Transfer of the functions to Anchorage would most likely mean the loss of those individuals (some of whom would be incredibly hard to replace) to research labs in UAF.

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