



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The Iditarod committed to running 2021 race

Enlists infectious disease epidemiologist to advise on 2021 race planning

WASILLA, Alaska - For its 49th running in March 2021, the Iditarod is developing a multi-tier COVID-19 mitigation plan to account for various permutations of the pandemic. The plan outlines specific safety protocols for different scenarios, contingency drills and rapid responsiveness with the goal of zero community transmission.

The plan addresses every facet – from the race rookie meeting to food drops to protocols on the trail and beyond – to ensure all race related activities can adapt to any COVID-19 dynamic while preserving goodwill, enhancing social consciousness, and ensuring stringent risk mitigation protocols. Much like the 1925 serum run to Nome, the Iditarod has shown that it too can persevere through a pandemic. As one of the only professional sporting events that continued during the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020, health officials noted that the race was “the ultimate form of social distancing.”

“We can’t over plan, and we have already begun embedding hyper adaptivity into our operations to ensure that flexible and nimble best practices are ‘at the ready,’” said Iditarod CEO Rob Urbach. “These challenges and the Iditarod are synonymous.”

Building off its safely executed 2020 race that ran during the height of the global outbreak of COVID-19, and working closely with state health officials, the Municipality of Anchorage, mushers, village leaders, Nome city officials and veterinarians, the Iditarod has also engaged an infectious disease epidemiologist with Emory University to advise on its race planning for 2021. Dr. Jodie Guest, who is also a longtime Iditarod race volunteer, will be advising the Iditarod regarding risk mitigation best practices, surveillance and contingency planning for the entire 1,000+-mile trail for the 2021 race.

“For me, the Iditarod is a family event. I’ve volunteered on the race’s logistics team since 2010 in Unalakleet, McGrath and Galena. My dad has been a race veterinarian for 12 years and my son volunteered for the first time this past year,” Dr. Guest said. “Being able to provide epidemiology expertise to a sport I love is an exciting opportunity as we ensure this race will continue safely in 2021 and beyond.”

Since March, Dr. Guest has been leading Emory’s outbreak response team for COVID-19.

“We are grateful to have Dr. Guest as part of the Iditarod team as she is pressure testing everything we do to ensure that we are meeting the safety standards of COVID-19 advised by national and state organizations,” Urbach added. “Moreover, the Iditarod is uniquely positioned to reinforce positive behavioral health choices with a culturally relevant voice.”



The Iditarod will provide further announcements in the coming months as it plans for a safe and successful 2021 race. For more information, visit www.iditarod.com.

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Media contact:

Bri Kelly, Thompson & Co. PR

Email: bri@thompsonpr.com

Phone: 907-903-9350