

Q&A from Covid-19 digital meeting 19/11/20

To begin with, we wish to emphasise that the regulations relating to Covid-19 are subject to frequent and rapid change. The below responses only provide an overview of the regulations on 23/11/2020 and everyone is strongly urged to keep up to date on an ongoing basis with applicable regulations at helsenorge.no.

Question: How will key information that we receive at this meeting be disseminated to members of the population who do not understand Norwegian?

Answer: *Questions and answers from this meeting will be published on the websites of the Longyearbyen Local Authority and the Governor of Svalbard. They will be translated to English and we will also encourage employers to disseminate the information to their employees.*

Question: Many people suspect we had Covid-19 outbreaks on Svalbard in January/February. Why is there no interest in measuring antibodies in Longyearbyen residents? I have heard that a lot of people who wanted to take this kind of test have been turned away even if they are willing to pay for this to be checked.

Answer: *This is only of interest in theoretical terms, and it is a fairly demanding and expensive process. These tests are also somewhat uncertain in their outcomes. There would have been more infections here if anyone had Covid-19 during February/March.*

Question: If there are a lot of Covid-19 cases on Svalbard, will we all be sent down to the mainland?

Answer: *No, there are no plans to evacuate people from Svalbard. We will initially use isolation and quarantine procedures. Serious cases requiring treatment may be sent to University Hospital of North Norway (UNN).*

Question: What rules apply to air travel in December?

Answer: *We urge everyone to comply with the government's travel recommendations. These state, among other things, that you should avoid*

unnecessary travel. Check the travel guidelines available online. These are subject to change at short notice.

Question: Following the most recent change, are people on Svalbard able to quarantine with friends on the mainland if they can document that this is appropriate (i.e. that there is a separate bathroom, dedicated bedroom, etc)?

Answer: *Residents on Svalbard are exempt from the requirement to stay in a quarantine hotel. You therefore stay with family or friends if the accommodation is suitable for quarantine purposes.*

Question: Why have you not introduced a quarantine requirement for people arriving on Svalbard from mainland Norway?

Answer: *This question must be directed to the national authorities.*

Question: Is it possible to use a rented apartment/holiday home on the mainland for quarantine purposes? Is it possible to quarantine with friends who also live on/are due to return to Svalbard?

Answer: *Information about quarantine hotels is available here: [The Government's circular concerning quarantine hotels](#).*

Follow-up questions relating to quarantine hotels should be directed to helsenorge.no, which is providing up-to-date information about the regulations on an ongoing basis. Helsenorge.no is a public website that gathers and publishes information from a range of healthcare providers. The information provided at Helsenorge.no has been quality assured and is up-to-date.

Question: What about rapid testing on Svalbard given we have such limited healthcare capacity?

Answer: *The rapid tests currently being trialled in Oslo are of interest. They are for use in sparsely populated areas such as Svalbard. I am currently awaiting the results of the trials to see how safe they are. I hope that we will be one of the first locations to be given access to them.*

Question: What is your view on the risk of infection from ships? For instance, there is currently a Russian trawler moored at Bykaia.

Answer: *All persons arriving on Svalbard must comply with the applicable regulations, including Russian trawlers. Our system is based on trust, and we presume that regulations are being followed. In the event of suspected violations of the infection control legislation, this will become a police matter.*

Question: There are many contractors who use employees for shift work in the town. Does this increase the risk of infection? Shouldn't they undergo Covid testing?

Answer: *We don't carry out tests on businesses or contractors who request testing for the sake of it. We carry out testing on the basis of medical indications.*

We fully trust that these contractors are aware of their responsibilities. When they engage workers from abroad, they must spend 10 days in quarantine on the mainland before they are permitted to travel on to Svalbard. This means that the risk is the same as when a Norwegian arrives here from the mainland on a scheduled flight.

Question: There are students abroad who seem to think they will be able to come home for Christmas and come straight back to Svalbard without having to quarantine on the mainland. What does the doctor make of this?

Answer: *Norway has opted for the principle that if you arrive in the country from abroad, you must quarantine for 10 days on the mainland. We see no reason to amend this principle.*

Question: The University Centre in Svalbard (UNIS) will be welcoming 100 students in January. Will this result in an increased risk of infection for us?

Answer: *We have discussed this with UNIS. There are both Norwegian and overseas students who are due to arrive, and those arriving from abroad must quarantine for 10 days on the mainland before travelling to Svalbard. UNIS will assist them with accommodation. This is a much lower number of students than would normally be accepted by UNIS, so I think it will be fine.*

Question: Why don't you test everyone arriving at Svalbard Airport?

Answer: *The hospital does not have the capacity to do so, and there is also no desire to test everyone upon arrival. People are not permitted to fly if they have a cold or should otherwise be in quarantine. It is important to emphasise that we have a vulnerable healthcare system up here, which is why it is important for people to follow the national infection control regulations.*

The exception that would necessitate testing a passenger arriving by air would be if they developed symptoms while en route. In this case, you should notify the cabin crew so that you can be tested at the airport upon arrival.

Question: Can the doctor provide advice and guidance to companies that have employees working shifts and who are staying in barracks accommodation?

Answer: *We expect contractors to have provided accommodation that ensures that not everyone ends up in quarantine simultaneously. This is the responsibility of each individual contractor. They are aware of this. Virtually all companies also have occupational health services that are able to provide advice on infection control measures.*

Question: Who will deliver contact tracing if we record infections on Svalbard?

Answer: *This will be the responsibility of healthcare personnel at the hospital who will constitute the contact tracing team. We will probably also require support from employers in Longyearbyen. Both the Longyearbyen Local Authority and the Govern will provide assistance in handling the situation.*

Question: I live in Longyearbyen. Can I travel straight to Svalbard when arriving from abroad and quarantine here?

Answer: *No. According to Section 9 of the Covid-19 regulations, you may not travel to Svalbard until after you have completed your quarantine period.*

You are exempt from staying in a quarantine hotel if you have access to other appropriate accommodation where you may quarantine for a period of 10 days. You must be able to document that you are a resident on Svalbard and that you have access to appropriate accommodation on the mainland in which to quarantine.

Question: If I am on the mainland and have been in close contact with someone who is infected with Covid-19, can I travel home to my home on Svalbard and quarantine here?

Answer: *No. You must quarantine. The use of public transport is forbidden when in quarantine. This quarantine must be completed on the mainland before you are permitted to travel home to Svalbard.*

Question: Do I need a negative Covid-19 test when arriving in Norway from abroad?

Answer: *Persons arriving in Norway from an area that requires quarantine must present a certificate of a negative Covid-19 test when arriving in Norway. This test must have been taken within 72 hours of the time of entry.*

There are a range of exemptions from this requirement, including exemptions for Norwegian citizens. Foreigners who are permanent residents on Svalbard are also exempt from the requirement to provide a test certificate. In such a case, you must document that you are a resident by presenting an excerpt from the population register. Persons residing in Barentsburg must present proof of their employment.

Question: I am studying in Denmark but am a registered resident in Longyearbyen. Can I return home to Svalbard during the Christmas holidays without having to quarantine on the mainland?

Answer: *No. Quarantine for those arriving on the island must be undertaken on the Norwegian mainland. This also applies to students.*

Question: Is there a quarantine hotel on Svalbard?

Answer: *No. Quarantine hotels are only intended for people who need to quarantine upon arrival in mainland Norway. Persons travelling on to Svalbard after returning from abroad must first quarantine on the mainland. The very principle is that we do not want to admit too many people who are at risk to Svalbard. If they were to become ill here, we are in a precarious situation in terms of providing emergency transportation back to UNN in the event that they require intensive care.*

Question: How quickly will residents of Svalbard be notified in the event of infections being recorded in Longyearbyen, and which local measures will be implemented in the event that this happens?

Answer: *If we record a positive test then this person will have been tested at the hospital. The person in question will then be confined to their home as he/she will be ill and they will be notified by the hospital.*

A communications plan has been drawn up to disseminate information to the population, and we will maintain an open line of communication in relation to any prospective infection. Residents will be informed as quickly as possible. The medical officer and head of the local authority are responsible for this and will present the message to the media and websites/Facebook on behalf of the Longyearbyen Local Authority and the Governor of Svalbard. Local media will be contacted by phone to enable us to issue supplementary information to the population.

We will evaluate whether to issue information to specific groups that do not understand Norwegian. In other words, we will disseminate such information widely.

Longyearbyen Local Authority has the power to suspend school classes/close the full school, as well as the power to close kindergartens, sports halls, cinemas, cancel events etc.

There is no plan to test the full population. Persons who have been in close contact with the infected individual should quarantine for 10 days, but they will not ordinarily be tested unless they present symptoms.

Question: I work at a facility and live in barracks here in Longyearbyen. We share a bathroom and kitchen. If there is an outbreak of infection in our accommodation, who will help me to secure alternative accommodation? Will I have to pay to quarantine in a hotel or elsewhere?

Answer: *If you are infected then you must isolate. We assume that your employer has a plan in place for this. Essentially, it is up to your employer to pay for alternative accommodation or a hotel if you must quarantine or isolate.*

Question: Is there a 'Covid hotel' in Longyearbyen where infected people can stay?

Answer: *No. We do not have a Covid hotel in Longyearbyen. However, Longyearbyen Local Authority has established a single house with capacity for 2-4 people depending on whether they are infected and must isolate, or whether they only need to quarantine. This house is intended for persons without their own homes on Svalbard.*

Question: Who will pay for people to quarantine? Is there a difference depending on the reason for quarantining?

Answer: *The employer, the individual in question or their travel insurance must cover the cost of quarantine. It depends on the situation.*

Question: Will there be a full lockdown of Longyearbyen if someone tests positive?

Answer: *No, we envisage a large degree of quarantine measures initially to enable the hospital to work in peace until we are able to form an overview of the situation.*

What we do next will depend on the situation: how many people are infected, where have the infected people been? If there is one single case and the situation is containable and we remain in control, then we have only one situation to manage. If there are many cases then we may need to implement different, more intense measures.

Longyearbyen Local Authority may implement measures depending on the situation and the extent. Local measures such as the closure of the school and kindergartens is not currently under consideration. There are currently no infections and that is our starting point.

Question: Have you considered the introduction of quarantine for visitors to Svalbard or for residents travelling to the mainland who then come back?

Answer: *No, this is not currently under consideration.*

Question: What kind of symptoms should you have before you get tested?

Answer: People with cold-like symptoms who call Longyearbyen hospital must answer a series of questions from the checklist that has been prepared. This will establish whether you are eligible for a test or not.

We have carried out approx. 200 tests. All have been negative, but many people have had common colds.

Question: Is there a risk that I won't be allowed to return to my permanent residence on Svalbard if I travel to the mainland for the Christmas holidays?

Answer: There is a risk that your stay on the mainland will last longer than planned. If you contract Covid-19 yourself or have to quarantine as a result of close contact with a person with a positive case, then you must complete your isolation/quarantine period on the mainland prior to returning to your permanent residence on Svalbard. The use of public transport is forbidden when you are in quarantine/isolation.

Question: I am a Svalbard resident but a Spanish citizen and need to travel home to Spain. The Spanish authorities require a certificate of a negative Covid test that is less than 72 hours old. Can I take an appropriate test in Longyearbyen?

Answer: In the event that another country requires a negative Covid-19 test, Longyearbyen hospital is unable to provide such a test. It is not the responsibility of the healthcare sector to do so if another country requires such a test. This can be carried out by private medical services or laboratories on the mainland.

Question: Travellers to Spain from Norway are exempt from the requirement for a negative Covid-19 test if they come from areas with little or no infection (Rogaland, Møre og Romsdal, Nordland, Viken, Innlandet, Vestfold og Telemark, Agder, Vestland, Trøndelag and Troms og Finnmark). Why is Svalbard not on this list? Is data from Svalbard being reported to the Norwegian authorities and how can Svalbard get onto this list?

Answer: Infection data from Svalbard is reported in the same way as from other regions in Norway. We are unable to provide an answer as to which assessments the Spanish authorities make and why Svalbard is not included on this list. This question must thus be addressed to the Spanish authorities.

Question: Is there a vaccine coming soon?

Answer: *We do not know for sure when it will arrive, but the picture is more promising than it was a month ago. We hope to have an answer before Christmas.*