



## **DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 27, 2021

21-016

## **Kalawao County receives COVID-19 vaccines**

KALAUPAPA – The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) delivered and administered COVID-19 vaccines to residents and employees at the Kalaupapa Settlement of Kalawao County on the island of Moloka'i this week.

Dr. Glenn Wasserman, chief of the Communicable Disease and Public Health Nursing Division of the Hawai'i Department of Health, and two DOH public health nurses flew to Kalaupapa Airport Monday.

"It is gratifying to be able to protect our Kalaupapa patients and community with these vaccinations. Our patients are elderly with significant comorbidities that make them especially vulnerable to COVID-19," said Dr. Wasserman. "We'll be back in four weeks to administer a second dose of the Moderna vaccine to those who have now received their initial inoculations."

Kalawao County registered its first case of COVID-19 in early December, which was contained without community transmission. It is the last county in the United States in which someone tested positive for the virus.

"COVID-19 impacts us all," said Health Director Dr. Elizabeth Char. "It is important we distribute life-saving vaccine fairly and equitably throughout the state to communities large and small."

"Residents are very appreciative to have been included in the vaccination program," said Kenneth Seamon, Kalaupapa administrator. "Protection from COVID-19 is critical to us since we do not have quick and easy access to medical services. We are grateful to Mokulele Airlines, which scheduled a special flight to deliver the vaccine, and everyone else who made this happen."

Kalaupapa Settlement once served as the home for individuals who were forced to relocate under Hawai'i law for the isolation of Hansen's Disease patients. When the State of Hawai'i abolished the law in 1969, former patients who chose to remain were guaranteed by law that they could continue living in Kalaupapa with the care and support of the State of Hawai'i. Kalawao County, which encompasses the Kalaupapa Settlement, is administered by the DOH specifically to care for the remaining Hansen's Disease patients and works closely with the National Park Service and State Department of Transportation to support the Kalaupapa community.



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