



Disease Reporting in Montana: Frequently Asked Questions

[Title 50 Section 1-202 of the Montana Code Annotated \(MCA\)](#) outlines the general powers and duties of the Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services (DPHHS). The three primary duties that serve as the foundation for disease reporting in Montana state that DPHHS shall:

- Study conditions affecting the citizens of the state by making use of birth, death, and sickness records;
- Make investigations, disseminate information, and make recommendations for control of diseases and improvement of public health to persons, groups, or the public; and
- Adopt and enforce rules regarding the reporting and control of communicable diseases.

In order to meet these obligations, DPHHS works closely with local health jurisdictions to collect and analyze disease reports. Although anyone may report a case of communicable disease, such reports are submitted primarily by health care providers and laboratories. The Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM), [Title 37, Chapter 114, Communicable Disease Control](#), outline the rules for communicable disease control, including disease reporting.

Communicable disease surveillance is defined as the ongoing collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of disease data. Accurate and timely disease reporting is the foundation of an effective surveillance program, which is key to applying effective public health interventions to mitigate the impact of disease.

What diseases are reportable?

A list of reportable diseases is maintained in [ARM 37.114.203](#). The list continues to evolve and is consistent with the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE) list of Nationally Notifiable Diseases maintained by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In addition to the named conditions on the list, any occurrence of a case/cases of communicable disease in the 20th edition of the *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual* with a frequency in excess of normal expectancy or any unusual incident of unexplained illness or death in a human or animal should be reported.

Who is required to report?

Any person who knows or has reason to believe that a case of reportable disease exists, shall immediately report to the local health officer ([ARM 37.114.201](#)). Although public and private health care providers, school administrators, and laboratory professionals are specifically mentioned in the ARM, health departments rely primarily on physicians, nurses, and other providers for disease reports. All reports should be reported to the local health department.

What information must be reported?

The required contents of the report are outlined in [ARM 37.114.205](#). In most cases, the report must include the following:

- Patient first and last name and middle initial;
- Physical address including city, state, and zip code;
- Date of birth;
- Sex, race, and ethnicity;
- Date of onset of the disease or condition and the date it was reported to the health officer;

- Whether the case is suspected or confirmed;
- Name and address of attending physician and other information for case follow-up;
- Name of the reporter or other person DPHHS can contact for further case information; and
- Any other supplemental information requested regarding a case as requested.

To facilitate the collection of the required information, confidential case report forms are available from the local health department. In some instances, health care providers and patients may be contacted for additional information regarding cases of interest that may involve standardized questionnaires or more detailed reporting forms. For example, cases of HIV/AIDS, foodborne diseases, viral hepatitis, and pertussis require supplemental forms. Supplemental forms are used to collect information to mitigate public health threats or comply with national surveillance reporting requirements.

How and to whom are reports submitted?

Reports may be submitted in a variety of ways to your **local health jurisdiction**. Generally, reporting forms designed to collect the necessary information are faxed or mailed to the local health department **as soon as possible** after a diagnosis is made or a strong suspicion of a reportable communicable disease exists. The enclosed list of diseases includes the contact information of the local health department where reports should be directed.

There are additional reporting requirements for laboratories performing specific tests. For more information, contact the local health department or the DPHHS Communicable Disease Epidemiology Program at 406-444-0273.

Should a provider wait for laboratory confirmation before reporting to the local health jurisdiction? NO! It is important to report suspected cases as well as confirmed cases so public health can respond in a timely manner with appropriate interventions. Delay can result in increased disease transmission. Reports should be submitted to your local health jurisdiction via fax or telephone. Contact your local health department staff for assistance or questions.

What about HIPAA and state law restrictions on release of protected health information?

The HIPAA privacy rule specifically states in Sec. 164.512: "A covered entity may disclose protected health information for public health activities...to: A public health authority...for the purpose of preventing or controlling disease, injury or disability..." [Montana Code Annotated \(MCA\) 37-2-301](#) requires physicians and other health care providers to report diseases specified by DPHHS. The Uniform Health Care Information Act ([MCA 50-16-5](#)) allows the release of information, without patient authorization, to public health authorities when such information is required by law or needed to protect the public health. Once information is in possession of the local health jurisdiction or state health department, subsequent release of the information is governed by the Government Health Care Information Act ([MCA 50-16-6](#)). This act outlines strict circumstances under which information may be released by a health department.

Additional information regarding reporting (including case reporting forms, disease lists, or disease summaries) can be obtained by contacting the [local or tribal health department](#) at the number on the reportable disease list or the DPHHS Epidemiology Program at 406-444-0273.