

Montana Health Alert Network

DPHHS HAN

UPDATE

Cover Sheet

DATE

September 2, 2020

SUBJECT

Update and Interim Guidance on Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

INSTRUCTIONS

DISTRIBUTE to your local HAN contacts. This HAN is intended for general sharing of information.

- Time for Forwarding: **As Soon As Possible**
- Please forward to DPHHS at hhshan@mt.gov
- **Remove this cover sheet before redistributing and replace it with your own**

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hhshan@mt.gov

Categories of Health Alert Messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Information Service: passes along low level priority messages that do not fit other HAN categories and are for informational purposes only.

Please update your HAN contact information on the [Montana Public Health Directory](#)



LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT reference only

DPHHS Subject Matter Resource for more information regarding this HAN, contact:

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For technical issues related to the HAN message contact the Emergency Preparedness Section at 1-406-444-0919

DPHHS Health Alert Hotline:
1-800-701-5769

DPHHS HAN Website:
www.han.mt.gov

DPHHS HAN

Information Sheet



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SUBJECT

COVID Updates for the State of Montana

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 activity in Montana continues, and this HAN provides important updates on topics including testing of asymptomatic close contacts, protecting health information in schools, and COVID-19 testing.

INFORMATION

A new detailed epidemiological analysis of Montana's COVID data was published yesterday and can be found here:

- <https://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/publichealth/documents/CDEpi/DiseasesAtoZ/2019-nCoV/COVID%20EPI%20PROFILE%2008212020.pdf>

Daily COVID-19 activity updates are available at:

- <https://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/cdepi/diseases/coronavirusmt/demographics>
- <https://covid19.mt.gov/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Testing of Close Contacts

Earlier this week CDC released new guidance about testing close contacts. This guidance states: *If you have been in close contact (within 6 feet) of a person with a COVID-19 infection for at least 15 minutes but do not have symptoms then you do not necessarily need a test unless you are a vulnerable individual or your health care provider or State or local public health officials recommend you take one.*

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/testing-overview.html>

Based on discussions with the State Medical Officer and the Governor's Coronavirus Taskforce, Montana DPHHS recommends all close contacts of known positive COVID cases continue to be tested.

Rationale:

- 1) We are a low incidence state and can prevent large outbreaks by finding positive cases earlier (including pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic cases).
 - a. While the exact percentage is not known, current estimates from CDC indicate that as many as 40% of COVID-19 positive individuals in the community are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic.
 - b. While the exact risk of asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic spread is still not wholly understood, we do know the virus can and does spread this way.

- 2) Controlling the number of active cases in the community along with following simple public health guidelines – wear a mask, watch your distance, and washing your hands – will help decrease disease in our communities.
 - a. With a lower prevalence of disease in our communities, the risk of acquiring COVID-19 decreases for everyone.
 - b. When the prevalence of COVID-19 is high in the community, the risk of congregate settings (i.e., nursing homes, assisted living facilities, schools, jails) having cases significantly increases. This holds even when those individual organizations are following the guidance to prevent COVID-19 from entering their institutions.
- 3) Good contact tracing leads to appropriate isolation and quarantine. This is an evidence-based strategy to prevent infectious diseases from spreading in our communities, and it is a prevention strategy which is the least disruptive to a non-infected individual within the community.
- 4) The availability of testing supplies and services is currently very good in Montana. The state has the resources to test all close contacts and current turnaround times are 1 to 3 days for high-priority individuals.

COVID Contact Provider Letter

A sample letter intended to facilitate the testing of close contacts referred by public health is attached. If public health agencies are referring close contacts for testing, providing this letter to close contacts and asking them to share it with their health care provider may reduce confusion. The letter provides a clear request for testing and provides LHJ contact information so the provider can call if they have additional questions about the exposure.

Expansion of COVID-19 Testing

Recently, DPHHS has worked with several in-state partners to increase the availability of COVID testing. Partners include Montana State University, and three regional hospitals: **Bozeman Health, Billings Clinic and Kalispell Regional Medical Center.**

In most instances, testing will be directed to your usual partners and no need to modify your current procedures is necessary to access this network. However, in certain circumstances, outbreaks or cluster investigations, public health may ask you to redirect specimens to a partner to ensure timely testing.

Testing done in coordination with DPHHS at the three facilities above is specifically intended to: *increase statewide laboratory testing capacity within Montana for the detection of SARS-CoV-2 virus within symptomatic, close contacts and other high-risk populations and to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 disease.*

Testing performed at the above hospitals is expected to be a regional asset for nearby health care providers/facilities who have COVID testing meeting the parameters above. The resources available at each facility will vary with testing demands and supply chain resources.

The Department of Public Health and Human Services receives a limited amount of testing supplies for distribution to these sites. We recommend coordinating with the appropriate facility prior to use to ensure test availability and submission procedures.

Contacts for the facilities:

Billings Clinic: (406) 657-4060

Bozeman Health: (406) 414-5010

Kalispell Regional Medical Center: (406) 752-1737