Beaverhead County Public Health update for the week of 3/15/2020

As of this writing, several cases of Covid-19 have been detected in Montana. At least one of these infections may have occurred during a meeting in Dillon, MT. Individuals with close contacts have self- isolated and will do so for 14 days from the exposure. There are no current cases in Beaverhead County, though this situation is fluid and changing rapidly. In an over-abundance of caution for the safety of our community, we have closed all the schools of Beaverhead County starting 3/16/2020 until 3/27/2020.

Our Public Health department is working closely with community partners to ensure that we are prepared. We are lucky to have an excellent hospital, law enforcement, and community leaders for support during this challenging time.

This is understandably a frightening time, and it is normal to have anxiety about the situation. We do not recommend that people panic, but we do encourage people to be prepared. **Ways in which you can be prepared include:**

\*Making sure you have back up plans for child care/pet care in case you become sick.

\*Ensure you are practicing good hand hygiene—wash your hands with soap and water (save alcohol wash for times when water is not available). Cough into your elbow or into a kleenex and discard immediately. Avoid touching your face.

\*Above all, if you are sick, please stay home. You may have a common viral illness which may be similar to Covid-19. Please stay home until you have felt completely normal for 72 hours.

\*Ensure you have supplies to stay in your home for several days if needed, just as you would prepare for a blizzard.

\*Ensure your workplace has some cross-training of employees, in case some are out sick for extended periods of time.

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If you feel that your symptoms are severe, or that you need medical care, please **CALL** your local health care provider. We can discuss your symptoms with you and determine if you need testing for Covid-19, and how that testing will occur.

Our State Lab now has over 800 tests and is testing every day. Turn-around time for results is approximately 24 hours for results. Testing capacity will likely become more available soon and we may be able to open up a more central testing location for our community.

Some people may worry that they are transmitting the disease while they are asymptomatic. Remember, when we are asymptomatic, we are not typically sneezing and coughing, so transmission is less likely.

**Things you can do to help:**

 \*Stay informed! Be careful to use reliable sources for your news!

 \*Practice “social distancing”. This means staying away from large groups or gatherings of people. If you are in charge of events, consider delaying the event for several weeks or consider an online forum. No social event is worth endangering you or others’ health. When in a public place try to stay 6 feet away from other people. 6 feet is the approximate distance that droplets from a sneeze or cough can travel through the air. If we are careful about practicing social distancing, we can slow the spread of the virus. This virus can only survive if it keeps jumping from person to person.

 \*Sanitize frequently touched hard surfaces within your workplace. Pay attention to things that are touched regularly and clean these often.

 \*Consider working from home if you have the option.

 \*Help-out a neighbor! Perhaps if you know someone who is isolated, ask if they need help with supplies. Maybe you know someone in the medical field that needs support while they work long hours. Many of us could watch the child of a neighbor that must work if the schools are closed.

 \*Consider seeking medical care only in a true emergency. Many things can be seen in the outpatient setting. We need to try to keep space available within our hospital.

Lastly, we need to protect our elders in our community. We have an aged population in our county, which makes them particularly vulnerable. Please avoid visiting the elderly if you have any symptoms. Our local nursing homes and assisted living centers are closed to visitors. Hospital visitation is restricted. If you are elderly, please try to have limited social contact. This is a lot to ask of someone but may help slow the number of severe cases seen at one time in our hospital.

As Montanans, we are naturally resilient. We will make it through this difficult time.

If you have any concerns or questions, please reference the following:

Governor’s COVID-19 website: <https://covid19.mt.gov/>

Governor’s COVID-19 Hotline: 1-888-333-0461

www.cdc.org

**Local health contact numbers:**

Public Health: 683-4771

Barrett Hospital and Healthcare: 683-3000

Community Health Center: 683-4440

Beaverhead Urgent Care: 683-4400

Ag Worker Health and Services: 683-5570