

COVID-19 PREPARATIONS GRR FIRE DEPARTMENT

The GRR Fire Department (GRRFD), Gallatin County, and the State of Montana have been making preparations for the arrival of COVID-19 to our community. It is now in Gallatin County and cases are increasing.

Visit the Montana Governor's Coronavirus Task Force website for current information on Statewide declarations and other information about the effort to deal with COVID-19 in Montana: <https://covid19.mt.gov>

Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs):

Five Neighborhood Support Teams have been formed on GRR. If one of us becomes ill with a respiratory disease and has to quarantine at home, we, as a neighborhood, should do what we can support that person or family. This can include provisions they need during quarantine by either shopping for them or donating items. There will be no face-to-face contact; therefore, there should be no more infection risk to team members than that associated with food shopping. Participation in these teams is your option, not a requirement.

These teams are not created to provide medical or in-home caregiver services. If a team member who lives alone is quarantined or chooses to shelter in place, at least one team member should consider checking by phone on a daily basis.

GRRFD is exploring a possible role for teams and team members to organize residents who have fabric work skills to make fabric face masks.

Team coordinators are:

NST-Southeast: Patti Draude and Sue Wassersleben

NST-Southwest: Vanessa McMurray

NST-West: Ken Weskamp

NST-Central: John Andrews

NST-North: Jorge Gonzalez

If you live on GRR and have not been contacted by an NST coordinator, email admin@grrfd.org.

Complete a My Medical History document:

The GRRFD has created a My Medical History document both for paper and electronic completion. **Complete this and enclose it in an envelope; post it on your refrigerator door or in an obvious location on your kitchen counter.** Do not send it to the fire department. If you have a POLST or advance directive not on file with Bozeman Health, paperclip that to the medical history document. This document will allow EMTs and the Emergency Department staff to know about your contacts and medical history and enable them to provide more accurate and rapid care than if they have to ask you all the questions on the document when you are ill.

If you previously completed a File of Life, please update it and stick it on your refrigerator door or place it in an obvious spot on your kitchen counter.

Your EMTs plead with you to do this today if you haven't already!

Can I get vaccinated?

No. There is no vaccine for the COVID-19 virus at this time. Vaccine makers are rushing production, but no vaccines are expected in the near future. They may not be available until 2021. Anybody who tells you there is a vaccine at this time is misinformed or fraudulent. Beware of scammers promising you a vaccine.

Do I need to get a prescription for chloroquine or hydroxychloroquine? How about Remdesivir?

NO! Chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine showed some laboratory evidence of effectiveness against the SARS virus in 2005, and there are reports suggesting they might help in COVID-19 patients. The number of patients studied and the design of the studies do not permit anyone to know they either really work. Better studies are needed to sort out: who should take either, when, at what dose, for how long, and what side effects are seen. Until these are done, medical providers are in the dark about who to treat, when, with what, what dose, and how long. These are not approved for COVID-19 use by the FDA. Remdesivir, an investigational antiviral agent being used in a number of experimental trials. To review the latest CDC recommendations, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/therapeutic-options.html>.

With recent publicity about these medications, expect prescriptions to be tightly regulated and shortages to occur for those who have legitimate reasons to be taking these medications.

What had GRR Fire done to prepare?

All GRR firefighters and EMTs have completed N95 mask fit testing. Each member of the department is issued one N95 mask, with spares on the medical quick response unit. GRR Fire personnel have all been educated about COVID-19 and protocols have been developed to coordinate GRRFD's response to the emergency treatment of actual or suspected COVID-19 cases. Our protocols are constantly reviewed in view of the evolving national, state, and local response protocol recommendations. The GRRFD staff has sufficient PPE at this time.

What will GRR Fire do in the event of an emergency in someone with COVID-19?

GRR Fire will respond to 911 calls on GRR. If a call comes in on someone who has or may have COVID-19, we will send a team with at least one EMT wearing proper personal protective equipment to assess and treat the patient. If the person requires hospitalization, GRR Fire will care for the patient in their home until a transporting ambulance arrives. (GRRFD is licensed as a Non-transporting Basic Life Support Agency with Authorization for Advanced Life Support. As such, GRRFD does not transport patients to the hospital under ordinary circumstances). Like every volunteer fire department, GRRFD does not pay its volunteers and cannot guarantee that an EMT is always available. If one is not available, we will ask Manhattan VFD to provide mutual aid.

Which COVID-19 patients need hospital transport by ambulance?

Ambulances will not automatically transport all suspected or proven COVID-19 patients to Bozeman Deaconess Hospital (BDH). Patients with moderate to severe respiratory distress, those requiring oxygen (bluish color to lips or face), significant other diseases (heart or lung disease, for example), new confusion or are difficult to arouse, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, and those in shock will be transported to BDH. Ambulances will not transport patients with none of the above, per Gallatin County protocol.

What if you are sick but do not need ambulance transport to the hospital?

Contact your medical provider or the Gallatin County Health Department (406-582-3100) for further instructions. Around 80-85% of COVID-19 patients do not need to see a medical provider or go to the hospital. They are best cared for in their own home. If they become sicker, they should call their medical provider or the health department for instructions. If they do not require an ambulance, they should drive themselves (if well enough to do so), or be driven by an already exposed household member, to BDH if directed to do so by their medical provider or the health department. Of course, if you deem the illness to be severe enough to call 911, do so.

What if you have an illness other than COVID-19 or an injury that requires ambulance transport to the hospital?

There is no change in ambulance transport protocols or services for patients who call 911 and need ambulance transport to the hospital emergency department for assessment and possible hospital admission.

How do I get tested for COVID-19?

Do not request a test unless you have had an exposure or have become ill. Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

1. Fever (more than 100 degrees F)
2. Cough
3. Shortness of breath
4. Loss of smell or taste
5. Chest pain with the above.

These symptoms are similar to influenza. Both illnesses also cause a person to feel fatigued and achy. Both can cause a scratchy throat and nose congestion, but not the sort of nose congestion of a common cold.

Testing indications and protocols are changing too rapidly to describe here. At this time, contact your medical provider's office or the Public Health Department by phone or electronic means for instructions. In communities with many cases, drive-through testing systems have been implemented. At the time of this writing, the main indications for testing are exposure or symptoms. Mass screening without a physician's order is done in other places and may take place here. **Follow the local news for details.**