

COVID-19 UPDATE 8/8/20 GRR FIRE DEPARTMENT

Aggressive action and the inherent social distances of Montana have reduced the frequency of new cases and have kept the healthcare system from flooding. However, there is a rise in cases since the state went to Phase 2 opening. This is not unexpected, but it sounds a cautionary note and reinforces the need to not become complacent. The GRRFD remains prepared and has trained in the management of COVID-19 cases.

We are still in the first wave of this pandemic. Some have mistakenly debated if this is the second—it is not. It is still the first. While Montana proved it can slow the infection to a crawl, as we did during March, April, and May, the increasing case numbers prove it is still very much with us and spreading in the community.

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>. Please check this website to learn the specific recommendations for Phase 2.

What does GRR Fire Recommend?

Continue social distancing.

This is probably the one most effective thing we as a nation can do. It is the thing that is most likely to keep you healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic, and also applies to every influenza season.

1. Practice good hand hygiene:
 - a. Vigorous hand washing for at least 20 seconds with soap and water after contact with surfaces you don't control, such as at stores or other public places.
 - i. Wash them immediately when you get home after going to stores or other public places.
 - b. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
 - i. Use them before entering and after exiting stores or other public buildings.
 - c. Wear disposable gloves when filling up at the gas station.
2. Wear a cloth face mask when you go to any circumstance that makes social distancing difficult. Follow the State and County mandates on face mask use in public spaces. The data supporting this recommendation is very strong.
3. Avoid touching your face.
4. Use disinfectant wipes or sprays on commonly touched surfaces, such as automobile controls, handles, doorknobs, and other frequently touched surfaces.
5. Avoid unnecessary or frequent shopping.
6. Keep at least 6 feet away from others except at-home family members.
7. **Stay at home if you feel sick.**
 - a. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 contact your health provider by email or phone. If you don't have a healthcare provider, contact the Gallatin City County Public Health Department.

- b. Do not leave home until cleared by your healthcare provider.
- c. If you live with others, see the section about taking care of COVID-19 patients at home.

Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs):

These teams are available to help home-bound GRRHOA residents in case they need to quarantine at home. If you live on GRR and have not been contacted by an NST coordinator, email admin@grrfd.org.

Complete a My Medical History document:

See the My Medical History section of this website for details.

Can I get vaccinated?

There is currently no vaccine available for COVID-19.

Get the influenza vaccine this fall:

COVID-19 and influenza have similar symptoms. Getting vaccinated for influenza will decrease your likelihood of becoming sick from the disease; the vaccine lessens the severity of the illness and risk of death even in those who become ill despite the vaccine. Preventing influenza will help prevent confusion of it with COVID-19.

Keep current on other recommended vaccinations:

Adults over 65 years old should receive pneumococcal vaccines. These reduce the risk of death from the most common form of bacterial pneumonia, one of the complications of COVID-19 and influenza. Routine childhood vaccinations should be administered on schedule. Parents of children are urged to update any past-due vaccinations.

Should I get antibody testing?

Probably not. At this point such testing is a valuable epidemiological tool. Get it if your medical provider or the public health department recommend it. However, there is no proof that having antibodies actually protects you from re-infection. We don't know how protective antibodies are and how long immunity will last if they do. Thus, a positive antibody test does not mean you are immune and can relax social distancing or other precautions.

Should I demand my doctor prescribe me preventive medications?

No. There are no medications, treatments, or vitamin combinations that are proven to prevent COVID-19, despite passionate (and mostly fraudulent) internet-based claims to the contrary. Since the last update a number of studies have been published that show no benefit from the use of hydroxychloroquine either as a preventive or treatment medication. Only one published study supported its use, but that study had serious flaws. A number of medications are undergoing clinical trials to assess their possible benefits, but none have proven effective in preventing COVID-19. To review the latest CDC recommendations, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/therapeutic-options.html>.

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. The EMTs in GRRFD will assume every patient has COVID-19, whether they know it or not. This includes calls for problems that are not COVID-related. In all calls, we send in one “scout” EMT to assess the situation and determine the risk of COVID-19, place a mask on the patient, and determine what resources are needed to care for the patient. GRR Fire will care for the patient in their home until a transporting ambulance arrives. 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?

Ambulance transport of COVID-19 patients presents a significant hazard to the medical personnel in the ambulance. To reduce this risk, ambulances will only transport COVID-19 patients with moderate to severe respiratory distress, those requiring oxygen, significant other diseases, new confusion or are difficult to arouse, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, and those in shock.

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

Contact your medical provider or the Gallatin City County Health Department (406-582-3100) for further instructions. Around 80% 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 the hospital 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?

Local testing is still limited to those with symptoms. 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.
6. New onset muscle aches and pains.
7. Headache.
8. New onset fatigue.
9. Confusion.
10. Some people have diarrhea, nausea, vomiting.

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. Drive-through testing systems have been implemented by Bozeman Health but require a physician order for testing. 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.

Antibody testing is not readily available or reliable. Many tests are on the 'market' but few are accurate. These tests are not appropriate for diagnosis of an active case. The presence of antibodies can identify a person who has previously been infected by COVID-19. However, they don't prove that person is safe from getting COVID-19 again.