

COVID-19 UPDATE 10/4/20 GRR FIRE DEPARTMENT

Complacency and carelessness have put people at risk. COVID-19 case counts rose through the summer and up to the present time. President Trump's infection is living proof that anyone can get this virus.

Montana proved it can slow the infection to a crawl, as we did during March, April, and May, increasing case numbers prove it is still very much with us and spreading in the community.

The Gallatin City County Health Department website provides the most authoritative local information about COVID-19, <https://www.healthygallatin.org/>.

COVID-19 spreads through contact with upper airway secretions. That is also how colds and influenza spread. Nasal secretions, saliva, spit, and sputum (phlegm) are the main means by which one person infects the next. The contaminated hands of an infected person can spread the disease through handshakes and shared touched surfaces. The kiss of an infected loved one can be deadly. A buddy who rubs his eyes and then shakes your hand can give it to you. This virus does not ooze from the skin. It gets there from the nose, mouth, or tears. We all produce airborne particles when we breathe, talk, laugh, clear throats, sing, shout, or cough. COVID is spread through these particles.

A simple face mask will prevent transmission of most of the upper airway secretions from infected individuals. This is a simple and unequivocal fact. Misinformation spreaders have disputed this but the science is clear. Wear a mask when in public.

What does GRR Fire Recommend?

Practice good hand hygiene:

1. 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.
2. Wash them immediately when you get home after going to stores or other public places.
3. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
 - a. Use them before entering and after exiting stores or other public buildings.
4. Wear disposable gloves when filling up at the gas station.

Wear a cloth face mask when in public places shared by others:

1. This is not a matter of politics; it is a matter of respect for the others we share our stores and public spaces with.

Socially distance

1. Stay 6 feet away from others aside from household contacts whenever possible.
2. That means no handshakes, hugs, or kisses.
3. Avoid large gatherings where others may not practice good distancing, hand hygiene, or mask use.

- a. Bars are probably the worst offenders.
- b. Weddings, funerals, and other large parties have become “super-spreader” events.

Avoid touching your face when outside your home

- 1. If you must rub your nose or eyes, then disinfect your hands with alcohol hand sanitizer immediately.

Stay at home if you feel sick

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

Create your own “protective bubbles”

- 1. Your vehicles:
 - a. Use alcohol hand sanitizer before entering your vehicle when away from home.
 - b. Drive alone or with household members as much as possible.
 - i. Wear a mask if you ride with a person who is not a household member.
 - ii. Insist that others wear masks if you ride with them.
 - c. Disinfect touched surfaces regularly using an FDA-approved viral disinfectant.
 - i. Disinfect them if you suspect contamination.
 - ii. Disinfect after anyone other than a household member rides in the vehicle with you.
 - iii. Disinfect your vehicle keys/fobs.
- 2. Your home:
 - a. Disinfect surfaces you might touch after leaving home or shopping:
 - i. Outside doorknobs, locks, and touched door surfaces.
 - ii. The kitchen countertop.
 - b. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water as soon as you walk in the house.
 - c. Consider leaving your shoes at the entry to not carry floor contaminants into the home.
 - d. Don't forget to disinfect your cell phone if you touched it while outside the home.
 - e. Minimize house guests.
 - i. It is no longer offensive to ask visitors and guests if they are or have recently been ill with a respiratory infection.
 - ii. Entertain in only small numbers and preferably outdoors.
 - iii. Consider wearing a face mask and ask your guests to do the same.
 - f. If you have children:
 - i. Make them use hand sanitizer before getting in your vehicle on trips, shopping, or after school.
 - ii. Make them use hand sanitizer before coming into the home.
 - iii. Make them wash their hands after coming into the home.
 - iv. Keep them home if they get a cold, fever, ‘flu’ or have any COVID-19 symptoms.

Don't become complacent

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.