

COVID-19 UPDATE 4/15/21 GRR FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Gallatin City County Health Department website provides the most authoritative local information about COVID-19, <https://www.healthygallatin.org/>. For additional information and updates, go to: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

The most important recent news is the availability of highly effective vaccines against the COVID-19 virus. The development of these vaccines has been much faster than previous vaccines for a number of reasons that include: the culmination of decades of scientific research, the high prevalence of the disease, and the international political and financial willingness to fund vaccine development and fund vaccine manufacturers' investment in studies and vaccine production.

The first vaccines are now available in the US and their details are well publicized and documented. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are both 95% effective in large clinical trials. The Johnson and Johnson vaccine was approved for emergency use but is on a temporary hold while several reports of unusual blood clot concerns in six recipients are investigated (out of 6.8 million vaccinations). These less than one-in-a-million reports will probably not derail this very effective vaccine, however.

Vaccine appointments are becoming easy to get, finally. Everyone 16 years of age and older is now eligible for vaccination and strongly encouraged to get a vaccination. Approval for children younger than 16 will probably take place in the coming months. The Gallatin City-County Public Health Department website, <https://www.healthygallatin.org/covid-19-vaccines/> had information about vaccines and vaccination clinics. Vaccinations are also available through Bozeman Health and other primary care medical facilities and retail pharmacies. The Public Health Department is running vaccination clinics at the County Fairgrounds which two GRRHOA members help staff (Drs. Piechowski and Andrews).

Until most of the population is vaccinated and the disease is suppressed, everyone will need to continue to socially distance, wear face masks, and practice good hand hygiene. There is no reason to think this virus will simply disappear, and we may have to deal with it for a long time. Unfortunately, those who decline vaccination will be an at-risk group where COVID will probably continue to multiply and sustain the pandemic. That is nothing to be happy about, but it is reality. Inevitable mutation of the virus has already led to variants that are less susceptible to the antibodies created with natural infection and some vaccines.

Issues that cannot be determined at this time include:

1. Will vaccine boosters be necessary?
2. Will vaccine adjustments be necessary to protect against emerging or future variants?

Vaccine Cards and Documentation

Everyone vaccinated receives a CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card. This card includes your name and date of birth and documents your vaccinations. This card is not a “vaccination passport”. It simply documents your vaccination. We recommend you do the following with your card:

1. Take a photograph or scan of the card and save it on your phone or computer, or
2. Make photocopies of the card
3. If you received your vaccination at a location other than your healthcare provider’s office: send a copy, scan, or photograph to your healthcare provider’s office so it can be entered in your healthcare record. That way, if you lose your card, your healthcare provider will have a record of your vaccination status.
4. Keep the card in a safe location where you won’t lose it. We recommend you keep it with your passport (if you have one), or where you keep your social security card or your vehicle title documents.
5. Don’t laminate the card; it has spots to document booster shots if they become necessary. If you want to carry a laminated version, make a copy and laminate it.

Documentation of vaccination into the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Immunization Information System, imMTrax, is automatic at most healthcare offices. If you get vaccinated through the County Health Department you have to give specific permission for them to share your data with that system. We strongly recommend you give your vaccination provider permission to enter your vaccination documentation into that system. In case you lose your card, that system will contain the documentation you might need in the future to prove your vaccination.

What does GRR Fire Recommend?

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

1. The science supporting the use of face masks is clear and unequivocal.
2. Facemasks are how we get America back to work.
3. Face mask use is not a matter of “freedom”, it is a matter of respect and responsibility.
4. Wear a mask when traveling in enclosed spaces with others—in vehicles, airplanes, busses.
5. Wear face masks to the greatest extent at gatherings, in church, at restaurants and bars, at the coffee shop, at the gym.
 - a. Of course, it is not possible to wear face masks continuously in those venues, but the more you wear it, the better you protect yourself and the others around you.
6. Watch the following video to get a better idea of how face masks affect respiratory particle transmission: <https://www.cnn.com/videos/health/2020/05/04/cough-coronavirus-masks-kaye-pkg-vpx.cnn>.

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. Consider wearing disposable gloves when filling up at the gas station or touching surfaces prone to high degrees of viral and bacterial contamination.

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 parties have become “super-spreader” events.
 - c. Even smaller family gatherings have led to multiple infections, something to think long and hard about during holidays. Be particularly mindful of the risk to older adults and those with compromised immune systems.

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

- d. 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.
- e. Do not leave home until cleared by your healthcare provider.
- f. If you live with others, see the section about taking care of COVID-19 patients at home.
- g. This includes all respiratory infections, including colds and the “flu”.

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.
 - d. Wear face masks when riding with non-household contacts, even relatives or friends.
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.

Cold and Flu Season Recommendations

Get a flu shot each flu season

1. The symptoms of influenza are the same as COVID-19. The two are easily confused, and the only way to tell them apart is by testing.
2. Influenza vaccination, on average, decreases your chances of getting influenza by about 50-60%. Those immunized who still get it generally have a milder illness and less risk of hospitalization or death.

Don't spread colds or the flu

1. While the COVID-19 pandemic rages, medical providers have to assume anyone with cold or flu symptoms have COVID-19 until or unless proven otherwise.
 - a. People with these symptoms must be off work until their symptoms are gone, testing or no testing.
 - b. People with a cold or the flu must not spread those infections to others, who will then have to undergo testing and quarantine.
 - c. The economic, educational, and work-related losses due to colds and flu will be very significant during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Avoiding spreading colds and flu is simple:
 - a. Don't send your kids to school with a cold or the flu.
 - b. Get a flu shot.
 - c. Take the COVID-19 prevention recommendations above.
 - i. It turns out that the COVID-19 prevention steps such as face mask use, social distancing, and hand hygiene are very effective preventers of colds and flu.

I've Already Had COVID-19, Do I have to do any of this?

YES.

1. You can still get colds and the flu. If you do, you will still have to be off work and quarantine until tests confirm that you don't have a recurrent case of COVID-19.
2. You have a responsibility to prevent others from getting your cold or flu, with the consequences as discussed above.
3. So, Yes, you should take all the same precautions as if you didn't have COVID-19 in order to lessen your risk of getting those infections and transmitting them on to others, including loved ones and coworkers.
4. For the same reason, after a vaccine becomes available, those vaccinated should still follow all the recommendations above.

I've Already Had COVID-19, Should I Get Vaccinated?

YES.

Studies have shown that people who get the COVID-19 infection generally produce antibodies to the virus which persist for at least three months in most cases. However, it appears the immune response to the actual infection is often not as strong or long-lasting as the response to available vaccines. A person with active COVID-19 should not seek vaccination until their symptoms have gone away. There is no "minimum interval" between resolution of the infection and vaccination, and people who have previously had COVID-19 should be vaccinated to provide them with better protection from reinfection.