

COVID-19 UPDATE 10/13/21 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 Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus is in the Gallatin Valley, and is responsible for a rapid resurgence of COVID-19 infections throughout the US. This variant drove a dramatic and tragic outbreak in India that caused their medical system to collapse and led to a tragic wave of death. This has become the dominant variant around the globe since its emergence in the spring of 2021. In October, 2021, Montana has one of the highest rates of transmission in the US. There are more COVID-19 hospitalizations, critical care patients, and patients on mechanical ventilators than at any time in the pandemic. The vast majority of these are unvaccinated.

The main difference with this variant is a change in the spike which makes it adhere to tissues and bind to a receptor in airway and other tissue. The easy way to think about it is that it is “stickier”.

The simple phrase critical care and infectious disease doctors use to describe how Delta differs from previous variants is: “Younger, Sicker, Quicker”. This variant hits younger people than earlier variants and it makes them sicker and that they sicken more rapidly. It is much more contagious (easily spread) than all previous variants due to the “stickiness” factor, and it is more virulent (more potent, making people sicker).

Experience throughout the US proves this is a pandemic of the unvaccinated. While breakthrough infections occur in fully vaccinated people, these people generally have shorter, milder disease with only a small percentage ending up in the hospital or dying.

The good news is that the all vaccines available in the US work well against Delta, preventing infections in most. Of those who do get infected, deaths are rare, hospitalizations very uncommon, the period of infectiousness is much less, and the disease is mild and shorter duration than in the unvaccinated.

In short: the Delta variant is a much more aggressive virus than the original one that hit the world in early 2020. Real-world data and experience show that vaccination is protective against the worst effects of this variant.

How to deal with the Delta variant?

Simply put: vaccinate as many people as possible, wear masks in crowded indoor places, and continue good hand hygiene. It turns out that the mRNA vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) work better than others to protect against Delta. The Johnson and Johnson vaccine is a bit less effective against infection but still provides substantial protection, especially against

hospitalization and death. A booster dose of Pfizer is FDA approved, and boosters for the other two are being considered as of this writing.

While mask use has become overly and tragically politicized, they work. They were well known to work in preventing respiratory pathogen spread long before COVID-19. Dozens of studies since early 2020 have proven mask effectiveness beyond a doubt. Given the fact that vaccinated people are more likely to have breakthrough infections than with previous variants (and have few or at most mild symptoms, so they are less likely to know they are infected), mask use by all in indoor public areas is recommended until the Delta Wave is done.

Vaccination is free and readily available through many pharmacies, physician offices, and the public health department. They are indicated for everyone 12-years of age and older. A few things to keep in mind about the COVID-19 vaccines available in the US:

1. They are safe.
2. They are not experimental.
3. They are very effective.
4. They protect the vaccinated person.
5. Vaccinated persons are less likely to get infected and spread the disease to others:
 - a. They protect American's children, especially those who are not eligible for vaccination at this time. That will help keep schools open
 - b. If you have children or grandchildren, your vaccination will help keep them safer.
 - c. They protect older Americans from infection and will help keep long-term care facilities open and prevent the people who live in them from feeling like prisoners (which was very much the case in 2020).
 - d. In short: they make our families safer.
6. They are the best way to keep America open for business.
7. They are the most effective way to keep American from having to wear masks.

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 else does GRR Fire Recommend?

Wear a mask in indoor public settings.

COVID-19 is a respiratory virus spread by exhaled respiratory droplets. That is a conclusively proven fact. Aside from vaccination, wearing a mask in indoor public settings is the best way to keep from spreading the disease to others if you become infected. Wearing a higher-filtration-efficiency mask will help protect you. Consider a KN-95 or Level 2-, or 3- surgical mask, now that they are in good supply. Consider an N-95 mask with air travel.

The science is done on this: masks are the most effective non-medical intervention available to curb the spread of this disease and get America back to work.

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.

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.
- d. This includes all respiratory infections, including colds and the "flu".

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

YES.

"Natural immunity" after a COVID-19 infection helps prevent reinfection. However, the antibody levels and immune system responsiveness is significantly improved after vaccination among people who have previously had COVID-19. There are many in other countries, such as Brazil and South Africa, who have become re-infected with variant strains of COVID-19.

Vaccines have been very effective against these mutant variants and should reduce the risk of re-infection.

I got COVID and they treated me with monoclonal antibodies. Do I need to get vaccinated?

YES (at least 90 days after the infusion)

Monoclonal antibody therapy is an effective way to treat mild to moderate outpatient COVID patients. It shortens the illness and prevents it from becoming more severe by giving the patient COVID antibodies. While effective, it may also blunt or prevent natural antibody formation and natural immunity. Therefore, those treated with monoclonal antibody infusions should be fully vaccinated. Since the monoclonal antibodies will also prevent vaccines from working, vaccination should be delayed at least 90 days to allow the monoclonal antibodies to go away.