



Missoula City-County Health Department

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

301 West Alder Street | Missoula MT 59802-4123
www.missoulacounty.us/HealthDept

Phone | 406.258.4755

Fax | 406.258.4781

MEDIA RELEASE

Contact, General:

Alisha Johnson

Public Information Officer

406-258-3341

Contact, Infectious Disease:

Brad Applegate

Infectious Disease Nurse

406-258-3898

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 4, 2020

Missoula City-County Health Department Asks Travelers to Call as COVID-19 Preparations Continue

The Missoula City-County Health Department's infectious disease and emergency preparedness teams, along with local and state partners, continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation overseas and in the United States and have created a response plan should any cases be confirmed in Missoula County.

"We've increased communications with the state, local hospitals, clinics and emergency responders, and we also designated staff to monitor information daily. Our team also created targeted messaging for groups, such as medical providers," said Cindy Farr, incident commander for the county's response team. "We've used preparedness exercises to test our response plan and are taking proactive steps to make sure the public has the necessary information."

The department also urges Missoula County residents who have traveled to China, Italy, South Korea, Japan or Iran to contact them as soon as possible, as these countries have experienced sustained or widespread COVID-19 cases.

"If anyone has recently visited the countries of concern, we need them to talk to the health department," Farr said. "We want to make sure they don't develop symptoms."

People who have traveled to the affected countries in the last 14 days should call 406-258-3896. While Missoula County currently does not have any cases, the health department encourages the public to take the following basic precautions:

- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces with regular household cleaners.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, scrubbing for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the restroom, before eating, and after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- If soap and water are not available for handwashing, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

- Do not travel to areas identified as being at elevated risk for the virus.

The department also encourages people to watch for symptoms such as a fever greater than 100.4 F, coughing, and difficulty breathing. Those who do develop symptoms should call their medical provider and stay home except to receive medical treatment. Farr also said that despite the hype, wearing masks is not a recommended way to prevent the disease.

“We need the public’s help at this point,” Farr said. “There’s no cause for panic, but being aware and increasing basic things like hand washing can go a long way,” Farr said.

The county also is ramping up communications and collaboration with state and local partners as the situation unfolds. Partners include the City of Missoula, the University of Montana, Missoula County Public Schools, Providence St. Patrick Hospital, Community Medical Center, Partnership Health Center and the Montana Department of Health and Human Services.

For more information, call Public Information Officer Alisha Johnson at 406-258-3341 or Infectious Disease Nurse Brad Applegate at 406-258-3898. Accurate, updated information also is available at <http://missoula.co/cvirus> or by calling 406-258-INFO.

###