



Missoula City-County Health Department

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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MEDIA RELEASE

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County Testing Center Receives Additional Supplies, Expands Free Testing Service

The Missoula County COVID-19 Testing Center received some welcome news that 500 additional swabs were heading to their clinic. This influx of supplies comes shortly after a large donation of tubes and viral media last week and an additional shipment of swabs from another source.

“Getting collection supplies has been challenging for local health care providers and us,” said Cindy Farr, Incident Commander of the health department’s COVID-19 response team. “This has led to limited testing in Missoula.”

Up until last Tuesday, the health department had to restrict testing to those with symptoms who were either over 65 years of age or had underlying health conditions. While the department based the decision on CDC guidelines, it meant that the data collected was limited.

“We know that there are more COVID-19 cases out there in our community,” said Farr. “We know that we have community spread in Missoula. These supplies are vital to our efforts to figure out how many cases are really out there.”

Since the testing center was able to open up testing to any Missoula County resident or Missoula health care worker with symptoms, they have found three additional cases that otherwise wouldn’t have been identified under the previous testing restrictions. While swabs will likely continue to be a limiting factor long-term, the influx of supplies can keep the center testing more broadly for now.

Farr is concerned that people are misinterpreting small case counts as a sign that COVID-19 risk in the community is low. She says that while the “stay at home” directive and other public health measures have helped to minimize the potential impacts that COVID-19 has not gone away. Without the ability to identify cases, there is potential for additional spread in the community.

“We’re excited that we’re able to offer this service to our county, and are encouraged by the supplies coming our way. We want people to take advantage of this opportunity and give us a call,” said Farr.

Farr encourages Missoula County residents and health care workers with symptoms to call 406-258-INFO(4636) and select option two to speak to a nurse. While an appointment is needed, one does not require a prescription to get tested, and the service is free. Nurses are available to take calls Monday through Thursday to schedule appointments for the next day.