

March 31, 2020

Do not let down your guard! This social distancing is difficult, however WE cannot let up now. Montana's experience with this COVID-19 pandemic is still in the early stages and is yet to be defined. We are fortunate on one hand in Park County to have tested so broadly and had very little COVID-19 disease (3 cases as I write). However, we are extremely vulnerable right now to an explosion of cases. Here is why: We are relaxing our standards, as families and kids are hanging out indoors together, many people are returning to Park County from spring break, to second homes, or to vacation rentals (with many from areas of heavy community spread of this disease), and Gallatin Valley appears to be the location in the state with the heaviest community spread. We still have a tremendous opportunity to control community spread in Park County. It will not be easy, and it will require us all working together with a focused commitment.

On essential trips to town for groceries and supplies, maintain 6 feet distance from others. Choose, if possible, times to shop with less numbers of people, as keeping this distance is easier. Avoid mixing of households (kids and friends) except for perhaps a long dog walk (or people walk), maintaining distance. This still allows for a good conversation but in an environment much less likely to pass on infection. Wipe down common fomites (surfaces all touch daily – faucets, door handles, etc.) in the home daily. Wash hands thoroughly, lots of soap and water for 20 seconds, upon entering home from community. This measure alone may be the most important way to prevent infection. Stay home, keep your family home, and avoid non-essential trips into the community.

If you have recently returned to Montana from elsewhere, quarantine yourself and all in the household for a full 14 days. If any one person in household develops symptoms of fever, cough, body aches, or loss of taste or smell (usually with these other symptoms), contact Livingston HealthCare at 222-3541 to talk through situation with our registered nurse hotline. If positive, all in household remain quarantined for 14 days or until all have recovered from the illness. We all desire our corner of paradise to remain as secure as possible. Returning in particular by air from larger cities and not following these recommendations poses extreme risks to Park County and jeopardizes the relative safety those returning seek.

Remember, there are three crises that we must confront with equal intensity: medical, psychologic, and economic. International, national, state, and community leaders are gaining many informed opinions to guide the response to the economic crisis. We can help by limiting the medical crisis as much as possible. We all must pitch in to limit the psychologic crisis, first from within, next with family, and finally with all others we can help through these tough times. Livingston HealthCare has behavioral health specialists ready and available to connect by phone or video with a phone call to 222-3541.

Current informed projections suggest Montana may be at peak in COVID-19 cases and deaths from the disease by the end of April. By that time, we will also have a better understanding of the severity elsewhere in the United States. I am confident there is a way forward but we must give the medical and scientific community time. The rate the scientific community is learning, communicating, and testing solutions is unprecedented! Let's do our part in giving our scientists the time that they need. I am also confident that the lighter our burden of this disease in our county over the next month, the faster a path to economic recovery we will enjoy.

The current response from Park County has been amazing. We have been given the gift of a head start and we are off to a good start. Double down now, be vocal and encourage others, and hang in there so that we can have the best possible control of our own destiny.

Sincerely,
Dr. Coleman, Chief Medical Officer
Livingston HealthCare