



News Release

For immediate release
February 27, 2020

Unified Health Command Prepares for Spread of Coronavirus, COVID-19

Billings, MT – The Unified Health Command (UHC), made up of Billings Clinic, St. Vincent Healthcare and RiverStone Health has taken several steps to prepare for the possible spread of the coronavirus known as COVID-19 in Yellowstone County. To date, there are NO CASES of COVID-19 in Montana.

Since January, members of the UHC have been on alert monitoring the evolving situation and preparing to take necessary measures to curb the spread of disease. Activating the Unified Health Command and proactively working with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services are some measures that have been taken to prepare for potential cases of COVID-19 in Yellowstone County. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advised on Tuesday about the importance of our health systems and first responders having the resources they need to respond and that the public has the information necessary to begin making individual plans.

As of February 26, there were more than 81,000 cases of COVID-19 worldwide, including more than 2,761 deaths. There are 14 cases in the United States that are not associated with the Diamond Princess cruise ship or U.S. State Department chartered flights from China. There have been no deaths to date in the United States. Cases of COVID-19 have ranged from people with little to no symptoms to severe illness and death. The CDC expects cases to continue to be confirmed, and the UHC wants families and individuals to prepare to take action to help prevent the spread of the virus.

The website Ready.gov provides family emergency plans and checklists to help you prepare for disease outbreaks and other situations. The best way to stop the spread of infectious viruses is by washing your hands, covering coughs and sneezes, cleaning surfaces and staying home if you are sick.

To date, the UHC has:

- Activated a unified command structure with members meeting regularly.
- Interacted with Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and state Department of Emergency Services to establish response relationships.
- Begun monitoring and conserving healthcare facility supplies of personal protective equipment, including masks and gloves.

- Set up a Joint Information Center to provide information and respond to news media requests.
- Established a public health information line at 406.651.6415.
- Worked to discourage rumors and misinformation.
- Reviewed current pandemic flu plans in preparation for a COVID-19 disease outbreak.

As this situation evolves, the public can find accurate and timely information on COVID-19 through the CDC's website, www.cdc.gov/COVID19 , and social media channels, as well as through RiverStone Health.

###

