



News Release

For immediate release

July 7, 2020

Multiple COVID-19 cases at Billings senior care facility

BILLINGS, MT – RiverStone Health and Montana public health officials are working to trace contacts of the 58 individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 in one Billings senior care facility.

Those testing positive include 15 employees and 43 residents of Canyon Creek Memory Care Community, a licensed facility on the West End. Two residents have been hospitalized.

“From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been concerned about an outbreak in a senior living facility,” said John Felton, Yellowstone County health officer and RiverStone Health president/CEO. “Canyon Creek is but one of the seven senior living residences reporting illness in residents and/or employees in recent days.”

Felton went on to say, “Seniors in congregate living situations are particularly vulnerable to tragic outcomes should they become infected with COVID-19. In this particular instance, we are especially concerned because of the challenges those with cognitive decline face in communicating, following personal hygiene instructions and their need for predictable routine.”

Canyon Creek management reports that it has notified all residents and their representatives of the outbreak and their test results.

Canyon Creek is licensed by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services as an assisted living facility. The state requires assisted living facilities to isolate residents who have tested positive and to quarantine residents who have been exposed to the virus, even if they have tested negative.

The facility is working with RiverStone Health and is setting up separate living situations for residents who have tested positive and those who have tested negative. Staff caring for those residents are also being segregated, thus reducing the likelihood of cross-contamination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued COVID-19 testing guidance in response to an outbreak in senior living facilities and RiverStone Health will be working with Canyon Creek to help them follow the guidance.

Along with investigating each case associated with this facility, RiverStone Health is helping to ensure that there are sufficient supplies of masks, gowns, gloves and other personal protective equipment and that all the PPE is being used appropriately to prevent further spread of the virus.

“While we are early in our investigation, given the limited outside activities of these residents, we suspect that this outbreak began with a staff member or visitor who was infected with COVID-19,” Felton said. “This is a heartbreaking example of what can happen when we don’t follow the 3Ws – wash hands, watch your distance and wear a mask.”

People of any age can contract COVID-19 and may become seriously ill, although most people have only mild symptoms and recover. Eight out of 10 deaths from COVID-19 in the United States have been among people age 65 and older, according to the CDC.

Surveillance testing over the past several weeks found very few positive cases among residents and staff of Yellowstone County assisted living facilities and nursing homes.

A surge in the number of COVID-19 cases last week in Yellowstone County prompted Felton to issue a Health Officer Order prohibiting most visits to senior care and elder living facilities in Yellowstone County. Felton issued that Order Friday after learning that seven senior care residences reported infections in residents or staff.

Yellowstone County confirmed 96 new COVID-19 infections between July 1 and July 6. That is more cases than in any entire month since the pandemic arrived in Montana.

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