News Release

People at High Risk for Serious Illness
from COVID-19 Should Prepare

Billings, MT – Older adults and individuals with chronic health conditions should take precautions now to help protect themselves from COVID-19, even though there are <u>NO CASES to date</u> in Yellowstone County or in Montana.

The Unified Health Command (UHC), made up of Billings Clinic, St. Vincent Healthcare, RiverStone Health and Yellowstone County Disaster and Emergency Services, urges Yellowstone County residents who are at higher risk of being infected with serious illness from COVID-19 to prepare for the likely spread of the disease.

"As we've seen from outbreaks elsewhere, older adults and individuals with underlying health conditions are at higher risk. If you're at serious risk, don't wait for an outbreak in our state to take precautions," said John Felton, Yellowstone County Health Officer and President and CEO of RiverStone Health. "Right now is the time to consider avoiding crowded places, long plane trips and cruise ship travel. Like many viruses, COVID-19 appears to spread more easily between people who spend time together in close quarters."

While individual risk is dependent on exposure, the potential public health threat posed by COVID-19 is high, both globally and in the United States.

People at high risk for serious COVID-19 illness include:
- Older adults over age 60.
- People of all ages who have severe chronic medical conditions, such as heart disease, chronic lung disease, diabetes and other conditions
- People receiving medical treatments that can suppress or compromise the immune system

Early data suggest older people are twice as likely to have serious COVID-19 illness if infected. This may be because their immune systems are less able to fight off diseases and they are more likely to have underlying health conditions. Reducing risk of exposure is an important measure for those at increased risk for complications of the disease.

Guidance for People at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19:

- Stock up on household supplies, over-the-counter medicines and groceries. Ask your healthcare provider about obtaining extra necessary medications or using a mail-order pharmacy.
- Take everyday precautions. Wash your hands. Avoid touching your face, nose, eyes and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect your home to remove germs, especially frequently touched surfaces.
- When you are out in public, try to keep distance between yourself and others. Avoid crowds, especially in closed-in settings with little air circulation.
- When possible, avoid touching high-touch surfaces in public places, such as door handles, railings, elevator buttons and the like. Use a tissue or your sleeve to cover your hand to touch them. Wash your hands after touching surfaces in public places.
- If there is a COVID-19 outbreak in our area, stay home as much as possible. Stay in touch with others by phone or email.
- Think about friends, family, neighbors, church members and others who you might ask for help if you become sick.
- Consider who could provide you with care if your caregiver gets sick.
- Pay attention to symptoms, including fever, cough, and shortness of breath. If you feel like you are developing those symptoms, or any other symptoms that are severe or concerning, call your healthcare provider.

Guidance for Family and Caregivers Supporting Older Adults:
- Know what medicines your loved one is taking and see if you can help them have extra on hand.
- Monitor food, household supplies and medical supplies and create a back-up plan.
- Stock up on non-perishable foods to minimize trips to stores.
- If your loved one is in a long-term care facility, monitor the situation, ask about the health of other residents and ask how the facility would handle an outbreak.

For more information please visit www.cdc.gov/COVID19. As this situation evolves, the public can find accurate and timely information at RiverStoneHealth.org. You can also leave a message on the public health information line at 406.651.6415.

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