



Media Release:

For Immediate Release:
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Rapid COVID-19 Tests Could Generate False Results: UHC Urges Residents Not to Use

Billings, MT – The Unified Health Command (UHC), made up of RiverStone Health, Billings Clinic, St. Vincent Healthcare, and Yellowstone County Disaster and Emergency Services, urges residents **NOT** to use rapid tests for the detection of COVID-19.

On Friday, March 20, 2020 the Food and Drug Administration issued the following statement, “We want to alert the American public that, at this time, the FDA has not authorized any test that is available to purchase for testing yourself at home for Covid-19.

Further, the UHC’s medical/technical team concluded that there are serious flaws in the test and that it will **NOT** help in understanding the disease in our community.

- These rapid tests look for the presence of antibodies, which are produced as part of the immune response to a virus. Antibodies might not be detectable for 3 to 7 days after infection, during which time a person could be infectious but the test might produce a false negative result. COVID-19 tests being sent to the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services Laboratory and to independent laboratories specifically identify presence of the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) virus; these tests do not.
- Rapid tests state that a positive result may be due to past or present infections of other coronaviruses. The term “coronavirus” includes a large group of viruses, not a specific virus. There are multiple strains of coronavirus, some of which are common causes of respiratory illnesses. This test does not differentiate SARS-CoV-2 (the specific novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19) from antibodies produced to fight any other coronavirus infection. This may cause a false positive result. The standard COVID-19 test currently in use selectively identifies the presence of the specific coronavirus causing COVID-19. Rapid tests do not differentiate between past or present infection with other strains of coronavirus.
- Rapid test results from antibody testing should not be used as the sole basis to diagnose, or exclude, COVID-19 infection. This clearly indicates the potential for false negative or false positive results. Widespread use of rapid tests in Yellowstone County

could skew our understanding of community spread and the rate at which new cases increase or decrease.

“Yellowstone County residents, appropriate for testing, should get tested for COVID-19 at either the St. Vincent Healthcare of Billings Clinic testing sites,” said Dr. Neil Ku, Billings Clinic Infectious Disease physician. A licensed healthcare provider must order COVID-19 tests.

Testing Sites:

Billings Clinic and St. Vincent Healthcare have set up interim testing sites.

Hospital testing sites are open for patients of their respective healthcare providers. Testing for COVID-19 is only conducted when ordered by a licensed healthcare provider following an appropriate clinical assessment. People cannot self-refer for testing.

- St. Vincent Healthcare’s site is in parking lot M, at the northwest corner of North 27th Street and 11th Avenue North.
- Billings Clinic’s site is located in the former dialysis unit on the west side of the hospital building.

All UHC healthcare facilities have set up health information phone lines:

- Billings Clinic HealthLine: 406.255.8400
- St. Vincent Healthcare: 406.237.8775
- RiverStone Health Public Health Information line: 406.651.6415

If you think you have a respiratory illness, please follow this interim advice:

- If you are sick and have mild symptoms, stay home and self-isolate as much as possible.
- If you are sick enough that you would normally go to the doctor, call ahead to your healthcare provider for instructions.
- To avoid spreading respiratory illnesses, please do not show up at a clinic, hospital, or testing site without calling in advance for instructions.

Everyday Precautions:

To reduce risks of respiratory illness, including COVID-19.

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often.
- Avoid touching your face. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow.
- Stay home, except to handle essential needs. Work from home, if possible.
- Maintain a social distance of 6 feet to avoid exposure to viruses.
- Avoid handshakes and hugs.
- Frequently clean “high-touch” surfaces in your home or workplace. Disinfect doorknobs, handles, keyboards, railings, remote controls, tabletops and counters.

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