



Media Information:

For immediate release:

June 4, 2021

COVID-19 hospitalizations rise in Yellowstone County

Billings, MT – Yellowstone County has seen an increase in the COVID-19 patient census in local hospitals in recent weeks, according to RiverStone Health, the county’s public health agency.

As of Thursday, 21 Yellowstone County people were hospitalized at Billings Clinic or St. Vincent Healthcare with COVID-19 related disease.

Over the past three months, the number of Yellowstone County residents hospitalized by COVID-19 dropped to five on March 6 and stayed under 10 through April 13. Since then, the daily number of Yellowstone County people hospitalized with COVID-19 disease has consistently been more than 10.

Hospitalizations have risen even as the total number of new COVID-19 cases reported among Yellowstone County residents leveled off in March, April and May.

What a difference a year makes. During May 2020, 19 Yellowstone County residents were newly infected with COVID-19 and only two residents were hospitalized. In May 2021, Yellowstone County logged 451 new COVID-19 cases and 34 residents were hospitalized.

“The majority of people hospitalized for COVID-19 are those who haven’t been fully vaccinated,” said Dr. Neil Ku, an infectious disease specialist at Billings Clinic. “When people get vaccinated, they help reduce the risk of hospitalization and reduce the risk that vulnerable people will get infected.”

Four Yellowstone County residents died of COVID-19 related disease in May. The latest resident death reported to RiverStone Health occurred on April 18, and was reported to Yellowstone County public health authorities last week as part of the state’s data reconciliation. On April 18, a woman in her 70s died at a hospital outside the state of Montana. At least 269 Yellowstone County residents have died of the pandemic disease since April 2020.

“Vaccination is the most effective way to reduce the risk of illness, hospitalization and death,” said John Felton, Yellowstone County health officer, and CEO and president of RiverStone Health. “We

are scheduling free, walk-in COVID-19 vaccination clinics to make vaccines more convenient for anyone age 12 and older.”

Upcoming clinics include:

- June 5, 5:30 – 7 p.m., Dehler Park, concourse behind home plate. The Billings Mustangs game starts at 6:35 p.m.
- June 11, 10 a.m. to noon, Montana State University Billings student orientation.
- June 11, 8 a.m. – 5pm, RiverStone Health, Lil Anderson Center, 123 S. 27th St.
- June 24, 4:30 – 6:30 p.m., Gardener’s Market, South Park.
- June 25, 10 a.m. to noon, Montana State University Billings orientation.
- June 26, 1 – 3:00 p.m., SummerFair at MSUB.

The Pfizer vaccine, which is approved for people age 12 and older, will be offered at all of the clinics listed above. The Pfizer vaccine requires a second dose three weeks after the first. Second doses will be offered at the same location the patient got the first shot. A parent or guardian must sign a consent form for people under 18 to receive a vaccine.

The clinics listed above also will offer the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to people age 18 and older. The J&J vaccine requires only one dose.

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