



Media Information:

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Flu, COVID-19 still hospitalizing Yellowstone County residents

Billings, MT – COVID-19 is still sickening people in Yellowstone County, but putting fewer local people in hospitals compared to a year ago. This week, eight county residents were hospitalized with COVID-19 illness. One year ago, 43 Yellowstone County residents were hospitalized with COVID-19 and 11 of were under intensive care on ventilators. During that month, the pandemic virus claimed the lives of 32 Yellowstone County people. During December, seven Yellowstone County residents died of COVID-19 illness.

Other respiratory illnesses also are circulating widely in our community. At the start of this week, Billings hospitals had 15 inpatients with flu. Since the flu season started early this fall, 1,646 cases have been diagnosed in county residents, 109 have been hospitalized and three have died. In the entire flu season of 2021-2022, our county had 1,393 cases.

Half of this season's local flu cases have been in children under age 18. Children under age five account for 300 cases.

It's not too late to get a flu shot. The flu usually peaks here in February or March. Early evidence indicates that this season's flu shot is good protection against the strains of flu now circulating. An annual flu shot is recommended for everyone age six months and older.

RiverStone Health Immunization Clinic provides vaccines for children and adults by appointment. COVID-19 vaccines remain available at no cost and RiverStone Health will work with individuals to make flu vaccine affordable. Please call 406.247.3382. Vaccines also are available at many other local clinics and pharmacies.

RiverStone Health received confirmation of seven Yellowstone County deaths due to COVID-19 in the month of December 2022. The victims were:

- A woman in her 80s who died on Dec. 20 at a Billings hospital. She was not vaccinated.
- A woman in her 80s who died on Dec. 14 at a Billings hospital. Both COVID-19 and influenza contributed to her death. She had received the primary COVID-19 series, but no boosters.

- A man in his 60s, who died at a Billings hospital on Dec. 10. He had received one dose of vaccine, not the full series and no boosters.
- A man in his 70s who died at a Billings hospital on Dec. 9. He received the primary COVID-19 vaccinations series and two boosters, but not the recommended booster that targets Omicron variants of the virus.
- A man in his 90s who died at home on Dec. 6. He was vaccinated with the primary COVID-19 series, but no boosters.
- A woman in her 80s, who died on Dec. 4 at a long-term care facility. She was vaccinated with primary series and one booster, but not up to date.
- A man in his 70s who died on Dec. 1 at a Billings hospital. He was not vaccinated. His death was previously reported as part of a Dec. 6 news release.

Every Yellowstone County resident who died of COVID-19 illness during 2022 had underlying conditions that put them at high risk for serious illness. According to the Montana Infectious Disease Information System, Yellowstone County suffered 104 COVID-19 deaths in 2022, 260 deaths in 2021 and 253 deaths in 2020.

RiverStone Health will keep tracking local data on COVID-19 and report it monthly. For weekly updates, check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention county COVID-19 tracker at covid.cdc.gov. The CDC reported “moderate” risk of COVID-19 in Yellowstone County this week.

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