

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 6, 2020**

I call on all residents of Billings and Yellowstone County to abide by the directives of our public health officials in order to slow the spread of the coronavirus. We should all renew our efforts and follow the advice of the medical professionals that worked before and will work again. Stay home if you are sick; avoid crowds and activities when 6 feet of separation cannot be maintained; wash your hands frequently; and cover your mouth and nose to prevent spreading droplets, presumably with a mask or other face covering.

One-third of all COVID-19 cases reported in Yellowstone County were diagnosed in the last week. Forty-five new cases were reported in Montana on Sunday, 16 of which were in Yellowstone County. That's 35.5% -- more than double our percentage share of the state's population. Yellowstone County has by far the most active cases in the state with 140, far ahead of #2 Gallatin County with 76.

Increasingly, it is young people who are coming down with the disease. Of the 16 people who were newly diagnosed on Sunday, 7 were in their 20s, and all but two were under 60. It is unrealistic to expect that the elderly and those in high-risk groups -- about 25% of all American adults -- should simply seal themselves off from the rest of us in a COVID-free cocoon. If we get sick, and especially if we get sick and don't know we're sick, we put the most vulnerable at risk along with all our friends, family, and co-workers.

That's why masks and face coverings are very important whenever we are in indoor public spaces, have contact for more than just a minute or two, and cannot maintain a safe 6 foot separation. Face coverings are a minor inconvenience that protects everyone else and ourselves. And that's why I strongly encourage everyone to wear a mask or face covering in those situations and to patronize businesses that require masks and face coverings for employees who deal with the public.

Together we can lick this thing, but it's going to take time, patience, and a lot of love for others.

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