

Dear Gallatin County Employer,

Thank you for the myriad of inventions you've instituted within your organizations to help us prevent the spread of COVID-19. Your commitment to the health and safety of our community is critical to our pursuit of controlling the spread.

Over the last few months you have heard about the importance of testing in our ability to control the spread of the disease. While this remains true, we also feel it's important for you to understand what a COVID-19 test tells us. A COVID-19 test tells us the status of an individual at the moment in time when they were tested. It does not tell us if they've been exposed in the past or if they are going to be sick in the future. It is possible for someone without symptoms to test negative on one day, even as they are incubating the virus, and then subsequently become a contagious COVID-19 case due to exposure that occurred prior to testing. A negative test only tells us that someone is not positive at the moment the specimen collection, and cannot rule out that someone is incubating the disease.

Because of the increased demand for testing and strain upon the testing system laboratories have implemented prioritization of tests for processing. Individuals without symptoms and with no known exposure cannot be prioritized over those who are symptomatic or close contacts of a known case. And due to a national demand for testing, some tests of asymptomatic individuals who are not close contacts of a known case are currently taking 7-10 days or more for receipt of results. The unfortunate consequence of this delay is that the delayed test results provide little or no help in limiting spread of the disease.

In the event that you're concerned that a staff member may have been exposed, but is not identified by the Health Department as a close contact, we do not currently recommend universal testing of staff as a means to screen for the virus. We do recommend that anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 seek advice from a health care provider and consider testing.

While there is no way to definitively eliminate risk of exposure to COVID-19. Gallatin City-County Health Department continues to recommend the following strategies to mitigate risk of COVID-19 spread.

- Frequent hand washing for 20 seconds. Hand sanitizer of at least 60% alcohol may be used if hand washing facilities are not available.
- Maintain 6 foot distance between individuals whenever feasible.
- Wear a face covering.
- Most importantly, stay home if you're sick. Speak with your health care provider and seek care and testing for COVID-19 when appropriate.

Your diligence and dedication to the health and safety of our community are appreciated. Feel free to reach out to our COVID hotline at 406-548-0123 every day from 8:00am-5:00pm with questions.

Gallatin City-County Health Department