Pressroom

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Governor Bullock Activates Coronavirus Task Force to Bolster State's Preparations

Bullock says Montana has no cases of coronavirus; state agencies prepared to respond

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Governor Steve Bullock, along with state public health and emergency response officials, today announced the activation of the Governor's Coronavirus Task Force. While there are no current diagnosed cases in the state, Montana is monitoring the fast-moving situation and taking steps to prepare and aggressively respond in the event the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak reaches Montana.

"Today I announced the activation of the Governor's Coronavirus Task Force to bolster the state's preparations and to ensure we are doing all we can to continue coordinating efforts across state government and aggressively respond," Governor Bullock said. **"Montana has conducted similar public health responses in the past – we are prepared and will continue to be throughout."**

The Governor's Coronavirus Task Force is a multi-agency task force that will coordinate public health response, continuity of government, and communication between state, federal and local partners. The Task Force will be led by Adjutant General Matthew Quinn, who has overseen similar situations. General Quinn directs the Department of Military Affairs, including the Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) division which is well versed in multi-agency coordination and all-hazard response planning. DES will engage agencies including the Department of Military Affairs, Department of Administration, Department of Commerce, Department of Labor and Industry, and Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS). The Governor's chief of staff and budget director will also sit on the Task Force.

"As Governor Bullock has directed, we have to ensure our state is prepared for the potential affects coronavirus may have in our state," Major General Quinn said. **"We are working to ensure agencies within state government are ready and able to support this public health response."**

DPHHS has already been working with local public health to monitor 25 Montanans who recently returned from mainland China for symptoms of novel coronavirus. Monitoring of those potentially at risk is intended to catch signs of the illness at the earliest possible time and ensure appropriate care and precautions are taken to prevent spread while testing is performed. One Montanan has been tested for coronavirus, but test results were negative.

"Our local county public health partners are truly on the front lines of disease surveillance, monitoring individuals potentially exposed to the virus, and keeping their communities informed," DPHHS Director Sheila Hogan said. **"This is a rapidly evolving situation and CDC is constantly reviewing and updating its guidance as needed. We encourage Montanans to stay informed by accessing reputable information sources such as the CDC and DPHHS websites."**

The DPHHS public health laboratory now has the capability to test for the coronavirus after recently receiving new test kits from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Until now, samples to be tested for the coronavirus had to be sent to the CDC.

"This is significant because it will allow us to test with a much quicker turn around," Hogan said. **"This will allow us to better support testing efforts for medical providers in the state should the need arise."**

Reported illnesses in the US have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed coronavirus disease. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure, including fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Generally, elderly people and those with other existing health conditions are likely to be more at risk of developing severe symptoms from respiratory illnesses.

Montana continues to receive daily updates and guidance from CDC. This information is then shared through the state's Health Alert Network to local health officials, including various travel guidance related to coronavirus. The state continues to communicate with CDC and local county and Tribal health to investigate and monitor possible exposures.

Governor Bullock emphasized that the same preventive measures that are recommended during cold and flu season will also help to protect against coronavirus, including:

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Cover your cough/sneeze with a tissue (or your elbow).
- Stay away from work, school, or other people if you become sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

These are everyday habits which can help prevent the spread of several viruses.

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For the most updated and timely information and updates related to coronavirus, visit the DPHHS website at www.dphhs.mt.gov, and Health in the 406 social media channels on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus

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Office of Governor Steve Bullock

OFFICE OF GOVERNOR
STEVE BULLOCK

Site Maintenance

Office of the Governor
PO Box 200801
Helena, MT 59620-0801
Toll Free: 855-318-1330
Phone: 406-444-3111
FAX: 406-444-5529

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