For immediate release
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Local Health Officials Reopen Developed Campgrounds

Lewis and Clark Public Health announced Thursday that public and private developed campgrounds in the county may reopen beginning May 1.

Health Officer Drenda Niemann rescinded the order she issued two weeks ago, which closed some campgrounds as part of efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

“We’ve heard loud and clear that some people in our community want to be responsible for their own personal health choices,” Niemann said. “Given that state campgrounds are reopening this weekend, we’ve decided to give them that responsibility.”

She noted that developed campgrounds are a “high-risk environment,” where local residents and travelers from out of county or state mingle and share use of facilities like toilets, RV hookups, and picnic tables. She urged residents to think twice about camping at these locations.

Travelers from out of state have been responsible for about a third of COVID-19 cases in Montana, according to the state Department of Public Health and Human Services. In Lewis and Clark County, about half of those who tested positive for the disease had traveled from out of state.

Niemann noted that the governor’s directive requiring travelers from out of state to quarantine for 2 weeks is still in effect.

“We worry that some of these travelers will choose to quarantine in campgrounds, or not quarantine at all, which would put other campers at risk,” she said.

“I’ve said it before,” she added. “Just because you can, doesn’t mean you should. I think every individual and every family should seriously weigh the risks of exposure to the disease against the desire to camp at developed campgrounds. We still don’t know a lot about the coronavirus and its long-term effects. Is it worth the risk?”

Niemann urged residents to take these precautions if they do choose to camp at developed campgrounds:
• Check ahead to make sure the campground is open. Some campgrounds, such as those managed by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, may still be closed.
• Pay attention to signs at campgrounds related to facility cleaning and closures.
• Avoid mingling with other groups of campers. Don’t invite them into your RV.
• Try to leave extra space between your camp and the next.
• Avoid using camp facilities whenever possible.
• Wash hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer often, especially before preparing food and eating and after using toilets or other shared facilities.
• Sanitize surfaces in your RV or camper before and after camping.
• Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the crook of the elbow.

“Remember,” she added, “the decisions you make about your own health also affect others. You could have COVID-19 and not even realize it. We’re counting on everyone to behave responsibly and respectfully.”

Niemann said the health department will be monitoring the course of the disease following the campground and other business re-openings. If necessary to protect the public, the health department may choose to issue new orders, as authorized by state law.

More local information about COVID-19, including guidance specific to campgrounds, is available by calling the health department at 457-8900 or visiting www.lccountymt.gov/covid-19