

For immediate release

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Contact: Drenda Niemann, Health Officer, 406-457-8900

Gayle Shirley, Communications Manager, 406-457-8908

Public Health Lists Criteria for ‘Reopening’ the County

Lewis and Clark Public Health has developed a list of criteria to help it decide whether the county is ready to move to phase two of the governor’s “Reopening the Big Sky” plan for COVID-19, once the state has moved in that direction.

The criteria include:

- the ability of the health department, hospital, and medical providers to manage COVID-19 cases without impacting regular business;
- enough staff and supplies available to test all residents with COVID-19 symptoms;
- the number of cases of COVID-19, what direction they’re trending, and how they were acquired;
- the number of cases severe enough to require hospitalization; and
- compliance of residents with orders and directives aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19.

LCPH also will use the criteria to determine whether the county needs to reinstate prior restrictions. A dashboard showing progress on the criteria is on the LCPH website at www.lccountymt.gov/health/covid-19/reopening-the-county.

“The governor will let us know when he thinks Montana is ready to consider lifting more restrictions,” said Drenda Niemann, county health officer. “But every county is different, and every county has different resources and different experiences with the disease. We don’t want to jeopardize the health of Lewis and Clark County residents by moving too fast or too slow. We want to be thoughtful about that decision.”

The health department has been significantly impacted by the pandemic, even though the county has had relatively few cases. The latest of its 16 cases was reported on April 9.

“We’ve had to redirect most of our staff to work on the COVID response,” she said. “We’re still not doing business as usual.”

Currently, much of the health department’s work centers on interpreting the governor’s directive for Phase One and educating the public about how it applies to unique local situations. The

department also takes complaints about individuals and businesses that are not complying with the directive. It enforces the requirements through a three-step process that begins with simple education and ends with potential citation or closure.

“We’re pleased there’s evidence that people are complying once they understand the reasons behind the restrictions and how they can better implement them,” Niemann said.

More local information about COVID-19 – including guidance for specific groups like retail businesses, guides and outfitters, food and beverage sales, campgrounds, and organized youth activities – is available by calling the health department at 457-8900 or visiting www.lccountymt.gov/covid-19.