Unified COVID Command Urges Residents to ‘Stay the Course’

A graph of COVID-19 cases over time in Lewis and Clark County shows a curve that’s been “encouragingly flat,” according to public health officials.

Since the first local case of COVID-19 was confirmed March 31, the county has had a total of 16 cases, with two hospitalizations and no deaths.

“While that’s still 16 too many, we’re heartened that our numbers have been relatively low,” said Drenda Niemann, health officer with Lewis and Clark Public Health. “Our strategies seem to be working, and we’d like to think it’s because of the sacrifices that county residents and businesses are making to stay home and keep social distancing.”

Graphs depicting the impacts of COVID-19 in the county are available on the LCPH website at www.lccountymt.gov/health/disease-control/covid-by-the-numbers. They show that the average age of people who’ve tested positive locally is 47.

Niemann cautioned that “these are small numbers, so we can’t make any sweeping generalizations from them.” And, she said, it’s too soon to declare victory against the disease.

“I urge everyone to stay the course, to not let down our defenses,” she added. “It really does seem to be helping, and we want folks to know that. This is what they mean when they say we’re all in this together.”

Also, Niemann said the health department has expanded its team responding to COVID-19 to include law enforcement, the county attorney’s office, local disaster and emergency services, and St. Peter’s Health. Together the organizations are working as a Unified Health Command.

“Given the scope of the issues we’ve been dealing with, we needed the additional expertise,” Niemann said. Among those issues has been enforcement of the governor’s directives related to travel, essential businesses, and social distancing.
Niemann said LCPH, like other health departments around the state, is starting to plan for the eventual need to “return to normal.”

“We know people are eager to get back to life as we knew it,” she said. “We’re eager, too. But we don’t want to lift restrictions too soon and send case counts soaring.”

It’s likely restrictions will be lifted gradually and possibly in some parts of the state before others, she said.

For more local information about COVID-19, visit www.lccountymt.gov/covid-19.