

MONTANA'S COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT TESTING INITIATIVE:

An Invitation to Businesses to Partner in an Early Warning System for Tourism and Gateway Communities

Building from surveillance testing efforts at long term care facilities, with Tribal Nations and with front-line health care workers, the State is pursuing more frequent and widespread COVID-19 testing in order to support businesses and the tourism sector as they reopen in Montana. The State, in concert with local public health officials and Federally Qualified Community Health Centers, is actively recruiting partnerships with businesses in tourism destination areas to begin voluntary testing of employees who may have frequent interactions with travelers through the course of their work. The effort, known as Community Snapshot Testing, aims to develop an early warning system for a COVID-19 outbreak through one of the major risk factors facing the state—travel. This increase in testing will not only augment efforts to identify cases early and support COVID-19 response and mitigation measures, it will build a foundation that will better prepare businesses for possible increased exposure that may occur in the future.

Governor Bullock's Reopening the Big Sky plan has relied on individuals and businesses to provide leadership in adopting measures to mitigate COVID-19 risks. As a result, Montana enjoys one of the lowest rates of COVID-19 cases in the nation, allowing for the state to proceed with reopening and welcoming back visitors who are critical to our economy. Just as the Governor has asked residents to support local businesses by offering them more than their patronage – he is also asking our state's visitors to do all they can to respect the decisions Montana businesses make to protect themselves, their employees, and the public.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT TESTING?

Through Community Snapshot Testing, the State is partnering with local public health officials, Federally Qualified Community Health Centers (FQCHCs) and businesses in tourism dependent and gateway communities to conduct COVID-19 tests of asymptomatic individuals for purposes of developing a community- level early warning system. While testing of asymptomatic individuals offers only a brief snapshot in time and an individual and business remains susceptible to COVID-19 exposure at any point following a test, more frequent testing at the community level among a subset of the population who may have more exposure risk can help to identify spread of the virus early and allow for appropriate mitigation, contact tracing and quarantine measures to avoid a large community outbreak which can disrupt businesses now and in the future.

WHY SHOULD MY BUSINESS PARTICIPATE?

More frequent and regular testing across our state will add an additional line of defense against COVID-19 impacts that will not only allow businesses to operate and thrive this summer, but will better prepare us for possible impacts should significant exposure risks increase later this year or in the future. Participating businesses receive the benefits of knowing of possible COVID disruptions early to help avoid a large outbreak, overwhelming our health care system with hospitalized patients and significant impacts across the workforce. Businesses also are permitted to display stickers and signage indicating that employees have been tested through the program.

WHY IS IT A HIGHER PRIORITY TO TEST WORKERS AND NOT VISITORS?

Visitors who may be COVID-19 positive will receive testing when requested, however travelers are likely to either return to their home states prior to developing symptoms or curtail their trip plans early should they become sick. Community spread of COVID-19 is more likely to materialize as a persistent problem among the state's workforce who may be exposed to these individuals.

WHAT BUSINESSES AND GEOGRAPHIES ARE TARGETED FOR COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT TESTING?

Through analyzing historic summer visitor trends and community health care capacity, the state is initially targeting work with the communities of Gardiner, West Yellowstone, Red Lodge, Livingston, and Flathead County (Whitefish, West Glacier, etc.). The state welcomes additional interest in the program from communities, businesses and local public health officials. Businesses targeted include those involving frequent interactions with out of state travelers in destination communities such as accommodations, restaurants, guides and outfitters and in businesses that serve travelers at airports and along interstate corridors such as rental car companies, gas and convenience stores and others. We also would like to target businesses that bring together many people.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A WORKER TESTS POSITIVE?

Positive tests will follow CDC protocols established for asymptomatic testing. Local Public Health (LPH) will follow up on all positive tests. Their work may include contact tracing with increased testing, quarantine and isolation measures, recommendations for deep cleaning and disinfecting of the establishment, along with other public health interventions. In some case, local public health may respond first with repeat testing to confirm a positive test is not an error. Contact tracing by LPH will help determine what employees had a significant exposure to the infected individual and if quarantine is necessary. Often, quarantine requirements can isolate individuals and Public Health will work closely with employers to minimize disrupt of the overall operation while keeping your employees and customers safe. All employees would be eligible for federally supported COVID-19 leave benefits. The state and local public health officials will maintain confidentiality of all individual and business testing results provided that disclosure is not necessary to address further public health risks.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR COORDINATING THIS TESTING FOR MY EMPLOYEES AND COMMUNITY?

The state can work with local providers and community health centers to identify testing options that meet the needs of local businesses, such as priority access to drive-through test centers. For further options, please contact the Department of Emergency Services.

WHO DO I CONTACT TO PARTICIPATE?

Montana Department of Emergency Services
Statewide Emergency Coordination Center
406.324.4777
Email: mtdes@mt.gov

ARE THERE ANY RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP MY BUSINESS AFFORD CHANGES TO KEEP STAFF AND CUSTOMERS SAFE?

The Montana Business Adaptation Program opened on June 1 to provide reimbursement for COVID-19 expenses related to keeping staff and customers safe – from the purchase of personal protective equipment to resources needed for staff to work remotely. Eligible small business must be Montana-based, employ 50 or less, have incurred eligible adaptation expenses since Feb. 15 due to COVID-19, and be in good standing with the Secretary of State or local tribal government. Nonprofit entities are eligible. Eligible expenses include costs related to communication, remote work equipment, cleaning supplies, tools to enhance social distancing and sanitation, travel and hotel costs related to quarantining workers. Total funding available is \$20 million, the maximum reimbursement amount per business is \$5,000. Learn more about this and other business support programs at COVIDRELIEF.MT.GOV.

