

***[This is an unedited realtime transcript of the Covid-19 Incident Briefing for Carbon County on April 2, 2020. I am a nationally-certified closed captioner, but this is not a certified transcript, it is to be used for informational purposes only -- Kathy Robson]***

>> Tom: All right.  
Welcome everybody to carbon county Covid-19 incident briefing.  
We're glad to be streaming live over Facebook, so this will be recorded and shared with you at a later time as soon as we can get to it.  
First off, I'd like to introduce the gentleman to my right. This is Jason MAHONEY, Carbon County public health emergency coordinator.  
Also serving as incident commander for the carbon county Covid-19 incident management team.  
We'll talk about that shortly. I'd also like to thank Amy HYFIELD and Asano Otsu providing the technical expertise. Couldn't do this without them. I guess I'll just start off by saying thank you.  
Thank you to all the residents in carbon county, thank you for distancing yourselves over these last couple of weeks. It's challenging for many of you.  
I liken the situation to the first quarter of the basketball game.  
First quarter, we're in the lead, and the coach comes in off the huddle, and says to the players that we need to space the floor, we need to pass the ball, and we need to stall. We need to stall for three more long quarters.  
And if you're sitting in the

bleachers you probably realizing that this is not going to be a fun game to watch.  
But stalling against an opponent like we have right in front of us, is what we need to do.  
We need to stall, we need to give our emergency responders, our medical providers time to deal with this situation.  
This will ultimately save lives. Thank you for routinely sanitizing your space and your home more frequently.  
We collectively all of these things make a difference.  
So be patient.  
Be productive, stay active, and most importantly be kind to others as we go through this.  
So today looks like we're going to do a quick update on the current situation both from a Montana perspective and also specific information to carbon county.  
Jason is going on give us that information.  
You are, please submit questions you may have to us during this live interview, via Facebook and Instagram and Amy and ASANO will try to track those and answer them as best we can.  
If we can't address them, we'll get back to you at a later date. I guess at this point I'll turn it over to Jason, and you can kind of give us kind of a situation report at this time.  
>> Jason: All right, good morning everyone.  
I'm sure you're much wag the great maps and tracking systems online but we'll cover where we're at in Montana.  
As of 8:00 this morning we're tracking 227 positive cases of Covid-19 in the state.  
And only 20 hospitalizations. I see that as a good thing, we don't have a ton of sick people, the majority of folks identified and tested positive in the state

are able to stay at home and recover there. That's very encouraging we hope to see that trend continue. We have seen five deaths in the state, and we hope to keep that number very low, and we're keeping everyone who's fighting this disease in our thoughts every day. Across the state of Montana we are doing a lot of testing, we're doing testing in carbon county, we're doing testing throughout the state. Just to give you some idea across the state of Montana yesterday alone, 402 tests were completed. We're approaching almost 5500 tests, 5,320 right now. State is testing, carbon county is testing, and for those carbon county residents that believe they may be ill, it's one of those things where you can call ahead to the hospital, call ahead to your primary care provider and make a plan to come. We'd rather folks don't come directly to the hospital unannounced. There's obviously special distancing measures we'd like to be able to implement to keep everyone safe. But carbon county is able and has the capability and capacity to do Covid-19 testing. So carbon county residents don't to have to go to Billings or other places to be tested if that does come up. Yesterday as I'm sure everyone knows, Dr. George announced the carbon county did have, we did have our first positive test in the county. The patient is a male in his 40s. He's recovering at home, he's not significantly ill requiring hospitalization and we're glad to hear.

That we're keeping him in our thoughts as well as he recovers at home. It's been reported that this individual was exposed, we believe, to Covid-19 outside the state of Montana so that exposure didn't happen within Montana, didn't happen within carbon county. We aren't going to release a lot more details about this patient but we're going to keep him in our thoughts and prayers as he recovers at home. We also are working very closely with the Montana department of public health and human services public health department and this incident management team to ensure that we are doing everything we can for this patient and for the citizens of our county. The public health department in carbon county is working very hard to flush out any exposure risk, travel history of this patient. They're working hard to communicate with anyone that may have theoretically been exposed or had close contact with this patient. Any close contacts that are identified will be closely monitored by the health department for at least that typical 14 day period. The incident management team that we have put together that Tom is going to explain a little more in a minute, we have some relatively robust capability to manage this situation. One of the things that we want to highlight is the capability that anyone who is in isolation due to the possibility or known exposure positive test, et cetera, for Covid-19, we have the capability to help provide their food and other essentials to them while they're in

isolation or on quarantine. We don't anticipate that there's any present threat from this patient who has tested positive since like we said, he is recovering at home and we're doing everything we can to provide for him there and prevent any contact with other folks that could be exposed. Anything else we want to cover there?

All right.

>> Tom: We're good, all right. I'd like to take a moment to discuss what this incident management team you may have heard about.

On March 5, a week before the first case in Montana was confirmed, carbon county commissioners authorized the formation of an incident management team to help with this pandemic in carbon county. My office, disaster emergency services, was asked to help spearhead that effort.

And I'm not a real smart guy, but one of the smartest things I've done is to surround myself with people who are experienced, knowledgeable, and dedicated, guys like Jason MAHONEY. And we've put forth a really solid team to help manage this incident.

Right now, the team consists of about 20 different members. Several of them representing carbon county departments, public health, the board of health including Dr. William George, disaster and emergency services, and our sheriff's office.

Also, representing -- representatives on the team include the various medical institutions in the county, bear booth billings clinic, SCL health, and riverstone health. I've also asked certain individuals who have a great

deal of experience with all hazard incident management to help out with the team structure, and their experience has been very much appreciated. So the team itself has about eight different objectives that we've identified throughout the course of the incident.

I'd like to touch on a few of these to give you insight of what we're doing.

The first and foremost one of our objectives is to continue to properly to, train, and equip all responders to ensure their health and safety throughout the duration of the incident.

We've been helping provide some of the best practice guidelines to all responders.

And training for first responders.

We're also secured additional P.P.E., personal protective equipment, from the strategic national stockpile.

We just received our shipment yesterday which we will begin to deliver to those first responders that don't currently have any.

We're still not out of the woods in terms of P.P.E., this shipment from the strategic national stockpile has helped or supplies but we're still in the process of securing additional P.P.E.

The second objective that we're actively working on is to maintain timely, accurate, and consistent communication between responders, stakeholders, and the public concerning Covid-19 throughout the duration of this incident.

Obviously through this live Facebook feed we're distributing information, hopefully you see many of our other chance we've been promoting.

Carbonalert.ORG, carbon alert chance both on Facebook and

Instagram.

We have a text messaging service that's now in place so if you text CovidCC to the number 99411 you will receive text messaging alerts when we distribute those. Hopefully most of you have tuned in to FM99 Thursday mornings at 7:30A.M.

You would have heard Beartooth billings clinic representatives today and Dr. George talk about the current status of the situation here in carbon county. And we've had numerous fliers and newspaper articles.

So I'm hoping that you're seeing this information come to you, if you still feel like you need information please reach out to us and we'll make sure we'll keep you in touch in some manner.

Our third objective and the one probably most relevant to the day, is our objective to contain the spread of Covid-19 within carbon county.

As Jay con mentioned, public health is diligently working to identify the possible contacts that our first patient has been in contact with.

We will continue to support and enforce the governor's directives and orders.

And Jason touched upon this a little bit, but we're also providing, we have had the group specifically within the incident management team that's providing food and essential supplies to help ensure that our isolation measures can and will be successful.

Specifically this group is delivering groceries and essential supplies Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

And you just have to qualify to receive those supplies.

You have to be 65 or older.

Those who have significant medical conditions that place

they will at risk under the current Covid-19 guidelines or those who have tested positive for Covid-19.

And to be eligible for the list, call us at 445-7258 to determine your eligibility and we'll make that happen for you.

So that's all I have on the incident management team.

If you have any questions, again, please feel free to text them in or just I guess put them on Facebook.

And we'll get to those momentarily.

Jason, I'll turn it back to you, perhaps you can talk a little bit about some of the projections that we have available to us in terms of peak times and die-off.

>> Jason: Absolutely.

The incident for health metrics and evaluation, it's a global health research center at University of Washington, has started to put out somewhat we're hoping are pretty accurate projections of the process of how we're going to make our way through the Covid-19 incident here.

What we know through these projections for Montana, given they are projections, and we'll see how accurate they are, but there's been a lot of data gathered and analyzed to come up with these.

Presently, we're looking at 24 days until the point at which we will reach the peak of our resource utilization.

Basically we're expected on April 26 to have the highest number of Covid-19 patients in the state of Montana.

We are watching that curve and I'm sure everyone has heard the term flattening the curve.

The curve that we're seeing is pushed off a little further in time than the national curve,

and we're hoping that that curve is going to continue to flatten itself thanks to everyone's participation and understanding as we implement all of the social distancing travel restrictions, sort of requirements and requests that we've made for a number of weeks now.

At this point, April 26 is when we expect the peak within Montana.

We're expecting then that virus die-off, the point when we expect to have no more patients in the state of Montana is looking to be somewhere around 26 or 27th of June.

So like Tom said, this may well and very accurately be described as the first quarter of the game that we're all asking you to watch and play along with us.

As we work towards being Covid-19-free in June.

Across the state, the projected number of deaths is 266.

That's a large number for us, and we're hoping to be able to through the measures we've implemented beat that projection.

But one of the best ways, again, we will be able to do that is to stay at home, keep your social distancing, a lot of other measures that Tom has talked about.

Right now, it is looking encouraging and we hope to see these projections change over time, they're updated daily. We hope that with everyone's help we'll be able to flatten that curve, cut down on the number of deaths, cut down on the number of illnesses, flatten that curve and do the best we can for the citizens of carbon county, the state of Montana, and hopefully we'll see those numbers drop nationally and worldwide as well.

>> Tom: Okay.

I'm going to briefly touch on just some of the travel restrictions that are currently in place and then I think we're ready to open it up for questions.

Just to remind everyone, travel by anyone should be limited to essential travel only.

For essential activities.

These include health and safety, necessary supplies and services, outdoor activity although we do discourage any high risk type of activities in the backcountry.

The reason is simply we do not want to have to have a situation where our responders are called out to assist a person in distress out in the country, takes time away from their other duties during this Covid-19 incident and puts them at more risk for exposure.

We're also trying to limit travel for certain types of work, you can also travel to take care of other family members or friends if necessary.

Again, according to the governor's directive, that was just recently put in place two days ago, any persons coming into Montana from another state or country for nonwork related purposes must self quarantine for 14 days immediately.

If a person will be present in Montana for fewer than 14 days, that person must self quarantine for their duration of their visit.

We do appreciate all of the local vacation rental agencies and homeowners who have stopped renting their vacation properties during this time.

I know this has been a big issue especially around the destination city of red lodge.

We really do appreciate the hotels and the vacation rental organizations have stepped up

and either initiated closures or put severe restrictions on their lodging institutions.

Can't say thank you enough in that regard.

I think we'll end it there unless you have any other comments, Jason.

>> Jason: I just would like personally to thank everyone that's a part of this team as well.

I work closely outside of my work in carbon county with different health coalitions in the state and I'm in constant contact with folks from the healthcare preparedness program, department of health and human services, et cetera.

I really feel that Tom and the group put together a great team, we did it earlier than many counties.

We got ahead of this, and I appreciate the work of the team and I just want the community to understand that we are working very hard, taking it seriously.

We're doing a good job.

Compared to other counties.

I hope we can do the best we can for the community.

>> Tom: Thanks, Jason.

Amy, ASANO, any questions that we can address?

>> Yes, we do.

So some of the first questions concern the fact that people have heard that this can spread without symptoms, and so can you make a comment about that, and is checking the temperature at the airport and some of the other things that happen within the state enough?

>> Jason: You know, since this is what's called a novel coronavirus, we understand the general classification of coronavirus but this is a new strain that we are working every day, hour by hour, day by day to understand better.

We can't say with, based on a lot of data or scientific certainty a lot of specifics about this virus yet.

There are folks working on this diligently all of the time to understand it.

We do have some anecdotal reports that there has been the possibility of patients being contagious, infected and contagious with Covid-19 without showing outward symptoms.

We're not seeing that's the norm, we're not highly concerned about that, but it is definitely something we're keeping an eye on.

The measures taken that are trying to identify the folks early on and limit their exposure to communities while they're contagious, the biggest things are the things that we've talked about.

Trying to stay home and limit exposure, et cetera, especially if there's a possibility that some one could be sick at home and not contacting other folks in the community.

One of the strongest ways to prevent that.

Temperature checking stations and things like that are another way that we're trying to identify folks very early on who may be contagious and limit that possibility of community spread or that person-to-person spread in the community.

Since we don't know the spreads or the details we would like, we are taking a broad approach to limit the spread as much as we can.

And, again, we can't thank folks enough for being compliant with those recommendations and helping us beat this illness and keep as many of us healthy as possible.

>> Another question about testing is, is there testing

available for those who may have suspected that they did have Covid-19 but now have recovered from those symptoms?

>> Jason: Sure.

Right now, testing capability as a nation is still somewhat limited.

Testing at this point is being reserved for generally speaking those folks that are exhibiting symptoms.

So there is no test right now that is readily available or widely available.

It will identify folks that may have already had Covid-19.

To the best of my knowledge there's no antibody test that would tell after the fact that some one had been infected and recovered from Covid-19.

There is work happening that way and I anticipate at some point those tests may be available. But that's not the case at this point.

>> We have gotten many questions around people are concerned about the individual that has been identified.

Wondering if it is possible to know what town they live in, where they live, are they self quarantined, while being in the state, getting information about that, either from us or from individuals who volunteer?

>> Jason: At this point we're following the standard that's been September by the state and nationally, in that we are working as healthcare providers do day in and day out to protect the privacy and the rights of patients no matter what they're suffering from.

So at this point, it's not ethical and it's not a standard practice to release much more information than we have released.

That being said, our public health nurses in carbon county

are on the phones, doing contact tracing, they're doing an investigation of anyone that may have come in contact with some one who has tested positive F there's a strong likelihood that some one has had close contact and could have been exposed, we expect that the public health department nurses will be in contact with those patients not only to help them protect their own health and safety but then if necessary to ask them to quarantine at home until we know if they may test positive. And in so doing limit that spread throughout the community further than it already has been.

We're not going to release a lot of specific information about the patient but understand that behind the scenes there's a tremendous amount of work being done since yesterday morning, that positive test came back, to mitigate any of the possible exposures that may have happened secondarily to this patient in the county.

>> Also getting questions about P.P.E. and how we're looking in terms of P.P.E. for first responders and for people who are not familiar with the acronym tell us a little bit more what P.P.E. entails, and talk about sort of our capacity within our healthcare system in the county.

>> Tom: I can start with that one.

P.P.E. stands for personal protective equipment. In this particular case it involves N-95 masks, some sort of protective eye wear, and ideally gown and/or gloves. That's the full compliment of P.P.E. we're referring to. In terms of where we stand, we're in better shape now than we were a week ago.

As I mentioned before, we did receive that supply, actually the D.E.S. received a portion of the supply, Beartooth billings clinic, and also cedarwood villa received a supply of masks and gloves, I think in some cases gowns to augment existing P.P.E. Although we did receive that, that will probably be the last shipment from the national stockpile.

So we are diligently working toward identifying additional resources that we can draw upon. The supply chain is still very limited at this time, we're hoping that those supply chains will be restored prior to hitting our peak time later this month.

There's also been a lot of generous donations from the community to offer SEWN masks, efforts under way to produce 3-D printed masks.

We are hearing those offers, and I just want to let you know that we are evaluating them.

They're, I guess, Jason, maybe I'll let you talk a little bit more specifically about some of the issues surrounding the third party type masks.

>> Jason: Absolutely.

Just to touch on a little of what Tom was saying and then move into the mask situation, not only are we working to attain or obtain more P.P.E. following CDC recommendations, a lot of guidelines that we're following as far as how we utilize the P.P.E. we have. We're keeping in touch with those national recommendations and minimizing the use of P.P.E. to the extent that we can, to keep our healthcare providers safe and still extend the amount of P.P.E. and the longevity of the stockpiles that we have.

At this point the CDC recommendation for these

homemade masks whether they be 3-D printed ones or the hand-SEWN masks, for healthcare providers, our EMS folks, hospital folks, et cetera, at this point those are considered a last resort.

Thankfully, through a lot of and a lot of hard work and leveraging connections we have at the state and national level, we are not at the point for our healthcare providers that we are going to have to use those masks.

Generally speaking, the concern is that if small particles of the virus are in the air due to some one coughing, sneezing, especially some one who tested positive or may be concentrated in a room with low airflow, the healthcare providers need to have those healthcare provider level masks to prevent those small particles from being able to enter the airways and cause infection of our healthcare providers, we understand are truly some of our most limited resources in the county and the state and worldwide.

It's not to say that these homemade masks, 3-D masks have no efficacy.

The CDC it's evaluating guidelines and recommendations around these homemade masks and there's some likelihood in the next few days, next week or so, we may see a recommendation from the centers for disease control that pretty much everyone that leaves their home or those isolated areas wear a mask.

Now to understand this, we have to understand that these homemade masks, if the recommendation would be for everyone to wear one, when they're out, is not to prevent say if I'm wearing a homemade mask, not to prevent me from inhaling something or becoming

ill, that can be very difficult if they're small viral particles in the air.

Where this really is effective, and goes back to the possibility of folks being contagious before they understand that they're sick, if everyone is wearing a mask, these masks, the home made ones, are relatively effective at stopping me if I'm infected and I don't know it, from coughing, sneezing, et cetera, and putting those viral particles into the air.

So the real efficacy of the masks we see it is that to prevent someone who is sick or someone who is ill and doesn't know it yet from producing those viral particles into the air that can infect other people. We'll see and definitely continue to push out information about CDC national recommendations as they come out.

We truly appreciate the groundswell of assistance and offers from community members all over the county to help with this process, and at this point we'll hold off for that short period of time to see what the CDC recommendations are. And like we said, we'll distribute that information as we receive it.

>> Tom: You see why now I surround myself with smart people.

Maybe a question or two?

>> Couple more questions.

Then we'll get back to people who are unable to answer your questions here, we'll get back to you on the web page. Carbonalert.ORG.

We are a community in which a lot of people have second homes, and we also have tourist season that's predominantly in the summer.

Are we concerned about people

coming back to our community? Do you foresee any additional closures with regards to people coming in to carbon county?

>> Tom: I would say that this particular topic has been discussed quite frequently and a group that we've set aside with our incident management team. We set aside a policy group consisting of the public health officials, Dr. George, sanitarian, county commissioners.

This topic of vacation rentals, red lodge being a destination has been discussed, and we've looked at what some of the other communities around in other states, specifically Colorado, are doing to try to limit that visitation.

I'm not sure we have come up with a clear direction yet but we're looking at multiple other models to consider.

>> Jason: Obviously this isn't something we want to do but in the end for the greater good if it's what is best for the community long term, it may be another one of those tough decisions we have to make and ask folks to be understanding as we move forward through that.

>> Do we have time for a couple more?

>> Tom: Sure.

>> The question about the 14-day quarantine for people coming in from out of state, how is that being enforced?

>> Jason: Obviously that's another very difficult question to answer.

We would love to think that enforcement is not necessary, that folks are understanding and hopefully understand the risks that travel might impart to the communities.

At this point, we're working again through that policy group to decide what sort of

enforcement efforts we might be able to take.

Again we're hoping they won't be necessary.

Initially, though, we're working on a number of different strategies to ensure that travelers from out of state are aware of this travel restriction or this quarantine order that has come down from the governor. We don't want to be trying to enforce something that people may not be aware of.

So we're working on education, and dispersal plan for that information to ensure that out of state travelers are aware of it.

And from there, we will continue to look at different strategies for enforcement if that is to become necessary.

>> Specifically the Montana department of commerce is advising persons listing hotels, rental properties and short term rentals in Montana including but not exclusive of Airbnb, VRBO, home away, to include notice of the mandatory quarantine for those people coming in.

Enforcement as Jason mentioned is difficult.

We're taking more of an educational approach at this time.

>> One last question, if we have additional questions after this or we would like to get more information and potentially watch this video, how do I go about doing that.

>> Jason: Like we mentioned before, we have tried to develop as many different information streams as possible.

Carbonalert.ORG, our website, we update most days multiple times a day.

The carbon alert Facebook page, the carbon alert page on Instagram, all of those are venues in which we try to

present as much information as possible.

What else?

There's so many, I have trouble keeping track.

>> Tom: If you have a specific question, you can always call our hotline, which is again 445-7258.

Again you have to leave your question on an audio message and we'll return that message as soon as we can.

You can also e-mail us at -- sorry.

>> Jason: It's

Covid19IMT@CO.carbon.MT.US.

And again, we monitor that e-mail account, and we'll do our best to get back to you as quickly as possible.

>> Tom: I would say that information dissemination has been probably our top priority and we've got four to five people diligently working on trying to deliver this critical information through all sorts of chance.

As I mentioned before, to other folks, this is a little different than our traditional incident, on most incidents that I'm involved with, involve fire and we're in remote situations, and things like internet and social media aren't available to us.

So we have to rely on public meetings and message boards and things like that.

This is flipped 180 degrees.

We have to now, we can't utilize public meetings, we can't do messaging to the community, no one is out and about.

We're having to rely on social media and various new technologies to distribute this message.

I hope you can tune in to those chance that we mentioned before.

>> I will just make a mention that we will post this video as

soon as we are able to on  
carbonalert.ORG and also get any  
of the questions that we were  
unable to get to here on  
carbonalert.ORG and let you know  
via our social media chance as  
well as carbonalert.ORG when we  
will have another Facebook and  
Instagram live session to answer  
your questions and pass on more  
information.

>> Jason: We'd just like to  
thank everyone for  
participating.

Stay healthy, and keep tuned in  
to all of those media chance we  
mentioned.

Thank you.