

COVID-19 INFORMATION

For the most current information about the virus in Montana, visit the DPHHS page here
<https://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/cdepi/diseases/coronavirusmt>

For Montana-specific social media information related to the virus, search “Health in the 406” on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

To get DPHHS new releases, go to <https://dphhs.mt.gov/AboutUs/News>

For the most current information about the virus nationally, visit the CDC page here
<https://www.cdc.gov/>

Hello Conservation Districts,

As Montana prepares for potential impacts of coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, Conservation District employees and supervisors are encouraged to review the following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

This guidance has been adapted for conservation districts based on guidance provided to us via the Department of Administration and will be updated as the situation continues to evolve. Our priority in providing this information is concern for the health and safety of conservation districts employees and supervisors and the continuity of the critical services they provide.

Each Conservation District should determine its individual work plan and determine if employees should transition to work remotely if the option is available.

Please know that guidance changes constantly. If you are housed in a USDA office with more stringent guidelines, follow those. However, conservation district decisions about the health and safety of its employees must be made regardless of whether the federal government remains open.

MACDEO will be sending out guidelines for preparing for a possible shutdown in a separate e-mail.

1. What is coronavirus (COVID-19)?

A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

2. I am worried about being exposed to COVID-19 at work. How can I reduce my risk?

Employees are always encouraged to use general precautions (at work, in public, or at home). Precautions include:

- Wash your hands with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds each time.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Refrain from reusing tissues after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched (cell phones, desk phones, keyboards, remote controls, countertops, refrigerator, door handles, etc.).
- Stay home from work if you are sick.
- Minimize your direct contact with others who may be unwell or who are vulnerable to illness.
- Get your flu vaccine if you have not already done so.

3. What if I or a member of my household have a compromised immune system, how can I limit my exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace?

If you or a member of your household are experiencing a compromised immune system and are concerned about possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace, contact your immediate supervisor. Your supervisor, board, and you can work together to make necessary arrangements so that you may work remotely.

4. What if I need to miss work due to a school, dependent care, or eldercare facility closure due to a COVID-19 outbreak?

If you need to stay home to care for a child because of a school closure work with your supervisor to make necessary arrangements so that you may work remotely.

5. What should I do if I think I am sick, but I don't know if I have been exposed to COVID-19?

If you have symptoms of fever and cough or shortness of breath and have not had any known exposure to or tested positive for COVID-19, contact your health care provider for further guidance. Regardless, if you are ill please stay home and contact your health care provider.

6. What should I do if I have been exposed to COVID-19 but do not have symptoms associated with the virus?

If you have reason to believe you have been exposed to the virus, contact your health care provider or your local health department. Notify your supervisor that you have taken this step. Employees may be required to remain under quarantine due to exposure to COVID-19 even if they are not symptomatic. If you are told by a health care provider or public health official that you should be under quarantine due to potential exposure, you should not report to work. You may also be required to provide medical documentation releasing you to full duty prior to returning to work.

If possible and appropriate for your work, you may also arrange to work remotely (telework). You may work with your supervisor to make necessary arrangements so that you may work remotely.

7. What should I do if I have been exposed to COVID-19 and believe I am developing symptoms associated with the virus?

If you think you are developing symptoms associated with COVID-19 and have reason to believe you have been exposed to the virus, contact your health care provider or local health department. Notify your supervisor that you have taken this step. If you are told by a health care provider or public health official that you should be under isolation due to COVID-19 illness, you should not report to work. You will be required to provide a letter from your health care provider or local health department indicating that you have completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period. You may also be required to provide medical documentation releasing you to full duty prior to returning to work.

8. I am concerned about exposure from a coworker who seems sick. Can I insist that they be sent home?

If you have a concern about an employee who appears to be sick, speak to your supervisor. They will make appropriate decisions regarding whether the employee will report to work.

9. Will I be notified if someone I work with is confirmed to have COVID-19?

Unknown process at this time. It's possible that employees that are known to be exposed to an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 will be notified that a case has been confirmed, but the Americans with Disabilities Act protects the identity and medical information of people with communicable diseases.

10. What additional precautions can employees take dealing with the public?

Conservation Districts may consider the following precautions:

- Restrict how close the public may come to employees.
- Educate employees to wash hands often and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently.
- Institute hygiene rules for meetings, e.g., no handshakes.
- Maintain separate pens and other equipment for the public.
- Practice social distancing and limit gathering size.
- Follow CDC, local health department, and the Governor's guidance on meeting size recommendations. Many conservation districts are making alternative arrangements for board meetings, including teleconferencing. Remember, that these meetings must be noticed and an opportunity for the public to participate must be provided. Additional guidance will be sent separately for dealing with 310 permit applications.

As of 3/17/2020

- NRCS is receiving guidance daily from USDA and is sharing through the chain of command as it is available. Please remember, this situation is fluid and evolving and decisions are being made with the best information available in accordance with the guidance being given.
- Just a reminder, USDA office closure is being approved at the Vice President level and above. If it is determined an office closure is warranted and needed, all federal and partner employees will be expected to stay out of the office until a determination is made to reopen. In this situation, most, if not all NRCS employees will be teleworking from home as best as possible.

- As always, if you have questions or concerns, please talk to your local district conservationist, area conservationist, or call the state conservationist.

As of 3/13/20

- Yesterday Governor Steve Bullock issued an [executive order declaring a state of emergency](#) to exist within the state of Montana related to the communicable disease COVID-19 novel coronavirus. The [emergency order](#) puts the state on highest alert.
- Governor Bullock has activated a Coronavirus Task Force to bolster the state's preparations and to ensure we are doing all we can to continue coordinating efforts across state government to respond aggressively.
- Department of Public Health & Human Services (DPHHS) is in close communication with our public health partners across the state, we're doing robust disease monitoring, and we're working to make sure that Montana is applying the latest expert guidance about this evolving situation.