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Missoula City-County Health Department Provides COVID-19 Best Practices to Reduce Large Outbreaks This Fall

As autumn weather arrives and more individuals congregate indoors, the Missoula City-County Health Department (MCCHD) is reminding the public to follow the best COVID-19 safety practices to avoid outbreaks at schools, offices, and other settings.

The MCCHD only continues to formally conduct contact tracing in congregate living facilities such as long-term care facilities, detention centers, etc. However, schools, offices and other large settings are still required to report outbreaks to MCCHD. Outbreaks can be reported by calling (406) 258-INFO (4636). This, coupled with the abundance of at-home tests that go unreported, means there is likely more COVID-19 in the community than gets reported. At-home COVID-19 tests can still be reported to the Montana Department of Health and Human Services [here](#). Individuals who test positive can help the community get a more accurate understanding of COVID-19's prevalence by reporting their results.

To properly use an at-home test, it is best to test oneself twice. Early on in an infection, an individual may test negative if there aren't enough COVID-19 proteins for the test to detect. If individuals are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, but test negative, they should stay home and take a second at-home test one to two days later. Most at-home test kits come with two tests for this purpose. Alternatively, individuals can book a PCR test with a provider. MCCHD no longer provides PCR testing or free at-home test kits.

Anyone ages 12 and older who previously received a COVID-19 primary series or booster two or more months ago is urged to get the updated (bivalent) booster. This booster provides strong protection against the Omicron variants currently circulating and previous strains. Keeping up to date with vaccines provides the best protection as their effectiveness wanes over time. As we continue to live with COVID-19 in our community, getting all recommended vaccine doses remains important to avoid serious illness, hospitalization, and death. MCCHD has several flu and COVID booster clinics scheduled in September and October.

In addition to getting boosted, to avoid outbreaks at schools and workplaces, anyone who is sick should stay home. Regardless of vaccination status, everyone should isolate from others when they have COVID-19. Everyone should also isolate if they are sick and suspect that they have COVID-19 but do not yet have test results. Those who test positive should isolate for a minimum of five days. They should only exit isolation after day five if their symptoms are improving and they have been fever-free without the use of fever reducing medication for at least 24 hours. The CDC says individuals with severe illness should isolate through day 10. It's strongly encouraged that individuals who exit isolation after day five wear a high-filtration mask, such as an N95 or KN95, through day 10 to avoid infecting others.

If a school or workplace is experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak, in addition to having positive individuals isolate at home, wearing a high-filtration mask such as a KN95 or N95 until the outbreak is over is one of the best tools to stop the outbreak from growing larger.

Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 should also consult their doctor or pharmacist to see if therapeutics are right for them.

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*The Missoula City-County Health Department's
mission is to build conditions that support the health
of people, environments, and communities.*