

## **COVID-19 RESOURCES FOR RURAL MONTANA**

We understand that the impacts of COVID-19 are being felt throughout the state, and that the economic impacts of closures are going to be significant across the state, including for our rural communities. The intent of the Stay at Home Directive and all other directives is to limit exposure and flatten the curve of this virus. Although many rural communities have few cases, and the goal of all these measures is to keep it that way and reduce exposure as much as possible.

Below is a list of resources available for business, communities, and individuals during this time. We will continue to update this as more directives come out and we have updated information, including guidance regarding the Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Please visit to [State's COVID-19 resource site](#) for more information, as well as [MT Department of Health and Human Services](#) for updated information and current cases. You can also call the COVID Hotline at 1-888-333-0461.

### **Phased Reopening- April 22, 2020**

On April 22, the Governor announced a gradual and phased reopening of the state beginning Sunday, April 26 for individuals, and extending to businesses on Monday, April 27.

***Please see the Directive and information regarding reopening [here](#).***

### **Economic and Business**

- [Here](#) you can find the Stay at Home Directive and information about essential businesses.
- The [Coronavirus FAQ](#) can also help answer questions regarding the directive and essential businesses.
- If you still have **business related** questions, please call 1-800-755-6672
- Keep an eye on the [Governor's Office of Economic Development Facebook page](#) and the [Montana Department of Commerce](#) for updates regarding business assistance and other helpful resources.
- SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loan and Advance- are available for small businesses in all 56 counties in Montana. This program received a \$10 billion expansion under the CARES Act and allows the SBA to provide a cash advance to the applying business. Businesses may now apply directly to the [SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loan program](#).
- Paycheck Protection Program- The Paycheck Protection Program is a loan designed to provide a direct incentive for small businesses to keep their workers on the payroll. SBA will forgive loans if all employees are kept on the payroll for eight weeks and the money is used for payroll, rent, mortgage interest, or utilities. Find out more information [here](#) and the [FAQ here](#).

\* On April 21, the Senate passed a bill for more funding for SBA's disaster loan and grant programs, including both the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) Payroll Protection Program (PPP). The House is expected to vote its approval on Thursday, April 23, and the funding will become available soon thereafter, possibly as early as next week.

- Non-Profit- For non-profit specific questions and resources go to the [Montana Non-Profits Association Website](#) for COVID-19 non-profit response, FAQ's, and updates. MNA provides several resources for nonprofits, including daily townhalls and COVID-19 relief information.

- The Governor has established the Coronavirus Relief Fund Task Force to provide guidance and advice on how to best use \$1.25 billion appropriated to Montana through the Federal CARES Act to assist workers, businesses, and sectors of the economy impacted by COVID-19. Over the next two weeks, the task force will examine all sectors of the economy to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on Montanans and consider the unique needs of each region of the state and support a long-term path to economic recovery. The task force will provide its final recommendations to Governor Bullock on April 30. Montanans can provide input on where the funds are needed at: <https://commerce.mt.gov/Cares-Act> and is also accessible through the covid19.mt.gov website.

### **Unemployment**

- Unemployment- Unemployment benefits will be available to all Montanan's who are sick, quarantined, or laid off because of the COVID-19 outbreak. DLI has set up a streamlined process and is waiving the usual 1 week waiting period to receive benefits. Visit: [www.montanaworkers.gov](http://www.montanaworkers.gov) or call 444-2545.
  - Note: *DLI Unemployment is experiencing an unprecedented call volume to their unemployment insurance claims processing help line and the agency is working hard to provide service to everyone. Please be patient.*
  - Unless you have received official notification from Unemployment Insurance that you must call the call center, please search for your answer at [dli.mt.gov/employer-covid-19](http://dli.mt.gov/employer-covid-19) in order to free up phone lines for folks who are required to call in.
  - If you are out of work or on reduced hours due to COVID-19, we encourage you to submit an unemployment insurance claim. Applicants can submit online at [MontanaWorks.gov](http://MontanaWorks.gov).
- The Federal CARES Act will also allow eligible individuals collecting unemployment to receive an additional \$600 per week. Please see at [dli.mt.gov/cares-act](http://dli.mt.gov/cares-act) for further guidance.
- Self-employed, independent contractors, and others- Under the CARES Act will expand Unemployment Insurance Benefits to those not traditionally covered, including the self-employed, independent contractors, and others.
  - DLI is now ready to accept and process applications for Unemployment Insurance claims. The user-friendly application can be accessed by going to [mtpua.mt.gov](http://mtpua.mt.gov) and clicking on "Apply for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance" or by clicking on the blue button below. If you already registered on MontanaWorks.gov, you still need to go to this new site to file a claim. <http://dli.mt.gov/employer-resource-covid-19>.

### **Healthcare and Insurance**

- Uninsured Montanans will be covered for COVID-19 testing and treatment.
- Governor Bullock has expanded access to telemedicine services for homebound Montana residents to help reduce visits to local hospitals and medical facilities, and for those who can't make it out to facilities. For more information please see the [Memo from DPHHS](#).
- The Department of Public Health and Human Services offers an expansion of mental health services to help Montanans during COVID-19. See Resources listed below or visit the [DPHHS Website](#)
  - The Montana Warmline: The service provides early crisis intervention with emotional support that can prevent a crisis. The Warmline is available at 877-688-3377 or at [Montana Warmline](#).
  - The Montana Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255) is also available.
  - The Montana Crisis Text Line, which can be accessed by texting "MT" to 741741.

### **Childcare, Schools and Education**

- Please visit the [Office of Public Instruction COVID site](#) for information about closures, school nutrition, emergency funding, testing, and more. Additional guidance can also be found [here](#).
- Childcare- Childcare is an essential business, and the Governor has provided [additional guidance](#) on childcare facilities to ensure that Montana's essential workers can receive access to childcare during the state of emergency
- College resources and information from [Montana University System](#).
- For a comprehensive list of resources, children's activities, and tools for the community, child care providers, families, and employers, go to the [Montana Child Care Connections COVID-19 resource page](#).
- [No Kid Hungry](#) is offering emergency grants to support local school districts and nonprofit organizations in their efforts to ensure kids get the nutritious food they need.

### **Homeowners and Rental**

- Limiting evictions, foreclosures, and disconnections for the duration of the Stay at Home Directive. [See Directive](#).
- [Low-Income Rental Assistance](#)- The Directive adds to Governor Bullock's temporary suspension of certain evictions, foreclosures and service disconnections by creating a program to provide rental assistance to households experiencing substantial financial hardship due to COVID-19. The Montana Department of Commerce shall administer a program to provide rent assistance to low-income Montanans who have suffered substantial financial hardship as a result of COVID-19. The program will also include relief funds specifically for households with children eligible for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Program details and application can be found [here](#).
- Housing- [Montana Housing Guidance](#)

### **Local Governments**

- The Governor issued a [Directive](#) to waive the current requirement that local and county governments implement a 2-mill emergency levy in order to access new funding coming to the state through the federal CARES Act.
- Increase flexibility by providing measures for the [operation of local government](#).
- [Elections](#)- allowing local governments to conduct mail ballot elections and expand early voting.
- Other resources and information can be found at [Montana League of Cities and Towns](#) and [Montana Association of Counties](#).

### **Community Resources**

- The Montana Community Foundation and local community foundations have set up Local COVID-19 Funds. Find out more about your [local COVID-19 Fund](#).
- Community Service- Organizations that provide charitable and social services are considered an essential business when 'providing food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals, individuals who need assistance as a result of this emergency, and people with disabilities' per the Governor's Directive. This would not include regular church services or gatherings where social distancing would be too difficult to maintain.

- Live stream/virtual church services are allowed. Limited staff may record services at the church, but must follow social distancing.
- [MSU Extension](#)- Extension agents are in almost every county across the state and working online to provide resources to help families, businesses, ranches and communities during this time.

### **Outdoor Recreation**

- Montanans are still allowed to recreate outdoors during the Stay at Home Directive. At this time, Montana State Parks, Fishing Access Sites and Wildlife Management Areas remain open to day-use. Social distancing applies, and respect for the resources is critical to keeping public lands open. Because travel exacerbates the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the public should use public lands in their communities, and non-local travel to sites is strongly discouraged.
- Check out [Fish, Wildlife and Parks](#) website for updates on closures, fishing, and hunting.
- Remember, any person (resident or non-resident) coming to Montana from another state or country for a non-work-related purpose must immediately [self-quarantine for 14 days](#). If a person will be present in Montana for fewer than 14 days, that person must self-quarantine for the duration of the visit.

### **Be aware of scams**

- Do not give out personal information, including Medicare/Medicaid, bank account, Social Security or other person information to unknown callers.
- Below are some tips to help you protect yourself from scams, including coronavirus scams:
  - Do not respond to calls or texts from unknown numbers, or any others that appear suspicious.
  - Never share your personal or financial information via email, text messages, or over the phone.
  - Be cautious if you're being pressured to share any information or make a payment immediately.
  - Scammers often [spooof phone numbers](#) to trick you into answering or responding. Remember that government agencies will never call you to ask for personal information or money.
  - Do not click any links in a text message. If a friend sends you a text with a suspicious link that seems out of character, call them to make sure they weren't hacked.
  - Always check on a charity (for example, by calling or looking at its actual website) before donating. ([Learn more about charity scams.](#))

### **Directives & More information:**

You can view all Directives [here](#).

- [Stay at Home & Extension](#)
- [14-day Quarantine for travelers](#)
- [COVID FAQ](#)
- [Joint Information Center](#)
- State General COVID-19 Hotline: 1-888-333-046
- Tourism Informational Hotline: 1-800-847-4868
- Website, details and maps: [COVID19INFO@MT.GOV](mailto:COVID19INFO@MT.GOV)

**USDA Rural Development** has put out the [COVID-19 Federal Rural Resource Guide](#)

USDA and its Federal partners have programs that can be used to provide immediate and long-term assistance to rural communities affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. These programs can support recovery efforts for rural residents, businesses and communities through:

- Technical, training, and management assistance;
- Financial assistance; and
- State and local assistance