

MNA Statement on Relaxing Stay-at-Home Restrictions

April 24, 2020

There has been increasing pressure for a relaxation on our state's "stay-at-home" restrictions resulting in our Governor re-opening the state in phases. The Montana Nurses Association (MNA) is concerned about the economic impact of this pandemic, but more importantly, MNA is concerned about the health of our patients and all of our citizens.

MNA would support loosening guidelines after the state has achieved three important goals:

1. A consistent drop in cases over a two-week time period coupled with reliable and adequate community testing.
2. Reliable access to testing and personal protective equipment (PPE) without the need for rationing.
3. The ability for ample contact tracing. (Expand testing needs to address tracing protocols, social contagion tracking, and epidemiology).

At this point, our state is struggling to meet all of these targets. Montana's supply of PPE and testing capabilities are still low in many parts of the state as is evidence by an inability to obtain testing supplies and the rationing and reuse of PPE.

Anthony Fauci, the administration's top infectious diseases expert, said Thursday that the United States needs to "significantly ramp up" its testing capacity in order to effectively contain the coronavirus as blunt measures like stay-at-home orders are eased. "I agree you don't need to test everybody, but you should at least be able to test the people in which you have to test to be able to do containment, and right now I think there's still some gaps there."

(<https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/494366-fauci-us-needs-to-significantly-ramp-up-testing>)

We know that social distancing and good handwashing is working but relaxing the stay-at-home order at this point could be counterproductive. The last thing we want is to open up too soon, see another spike in cases, and have to revert back to another stay-at-home order. The Montana response has had a positive result and our concern is if we open before important goals are met, our state will lose progress made and will be compromised.

Many of our members are bearing the COVID-19's economic impacts so this is not taken lightly. Elective surgeries and other healthcare visits have been canceled or reduced forcing many nurses to suffer a reduction in hours. Many nurse practitioners, owning their own primary health care clinics, are seeing a massive reduction in patient visits coupled with an inability to test for covid and obtain proper PPE, devastating their ability to survive and provide healthcare for their communities

One of MNA's top concerns is the potential to re-open our schools. Schools are not designed for social distancing. Many students have underlying health issues such as asthma and diabetes, not to mention poor hand hygiene that comes with just being young. We support MFPE (Montana Federation of Public Employees) along with any school superintendents and school boards that recommend to keep our schools closed for this school year and focus on ways to safely resume in the fall.

MNA will continue to advocate for citizens to continue to stay home. This is how we have flattened the curve and why our infection numbers are low. We are protecting ourselves and each other every day while we adhere to social distancing. If you have to be out in the public, wash your hands frequently, wear a mask to protect others from you (as non-symptomatic people can spread the virus), and stay 6ft or more away from others.

Flattening the curve by social distancing is not easy for any of us, but it is the most efficient and effective way to prevent further spread of coronavirus, moreover, it is all we have until further research and evidence surrounding antibody testing, testing for immunity, and the production of a possible vaccine can be relied on.