



July 20, 2020

Dear Local Business:

On July 15th, Montana Governor Bullock issued a new directive requiring mask-wearing in public venues, effective immediately. The Health Department does not receive advanced notice of these Directives. Thank you for your patience and understanding of the untimeliness of this information. We are working to get clarification on many of the issues brought on through this new directive and share them with you as fast as possible.

Below are the answers to several questions the Department has received thus far. Enclosed is a copy of the actual directive from July 15th, as well as a set of FAQs put forth by the Governor's Office. Please contact the COVID Information Line (a 24/7 number) at 406-433-6947 should you have any questions. Please be patient and kind as we navigate this pandemic together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brittney Petersen".

Brittney Petersen, MS
Administrator, Richland County Health Department

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the mask mandate mean for my establishment?

The July 15th Directive requires masks or other face coverings to be worn by folks in indoor spaces open to the public. This includes businesses where the public are present. Masks or other face coverings are required to be worn by public-facing employees. This would include servers, hostesses, bartenders, front desk staff, etc., but would not include employees working in areas where the public is not invited, such as the kitchen or back office.

What if I'm by myself?

A face covering should be worn by public-facing employees when members of the public are present. A face covering may be removed when the public are no longer present, and replaced when more patrons enter.

Do we have to provide masks?

Businesses are responsible for providing face coverings for their employees. Members of the public must provide their own face covering.

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How are we supposed to enforce this?

The FAQs read, "All businesses...shall require and take reasonable measures to ensure that all employees, contractors, volunteers, customers, or other members of the public wear a face covering that covers their mouth and nose at all times while entering or remaining in any indoor spaces open to the public." Your business should determine how employees are expected to ensure the Directive is followed. Be aware that each individual business may choose to handle this situation differently. Please be patient and kind.

What if someone isn't wearing a face covering?

There is a list of exceptions to the Directive's requirements (please see the Directive). The FAQs read, "Businesses...are entitled to reasonably rely in good faith on the representations of employees, volunteers, contractors, customers, visitors, or members of the public regarding the applicability of the exceptions in section 4 of the Governor's Directive." Your businesses should determine how employees will handle patrons who are not wearing face coverings. Be aware that each individual business may choose to handle this situation differently. Please be patient and kind.

Where can we get signs?

Mask signs are available at <https://covid19.mt.gov/Masks-and-Face-Coverings>. You may also choose to develop your own.

But masks don't even work!

The Health Department records information about mask wearing from each positive case in Richland County during the contact tracing process. The number of positive cases in a cluster is increased when the index case (the original positive that infected others) was not wearing a mask. In fact, one case was unknowingly positive, and named 8 close contacts. The individual wore a mask diligently, and none of the named contacts developed COVID-19. Alternatively, another case did not wear a mask at all, and infected 3 individuals.

The Directive is only applicable to counties with 4 or more active cases. How will we know when it no longer applies to Richland County?

Case updates are posted regularly on the Health Department's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/RichlandCountyHealthDepartment/>), in the newspapers, on our website at <http://www.richland.org/index.aspx?nid=764>, and will be put on the Chamber's outdoor LED screen. Updates always include the total number of cases for the pandemic, the number of active cases, and the number of recovered cases. Remember that these numbers change often and quite rapidly. When in doubt, please call the 24/7 COVID Information Line at 406-433-6947.