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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Rhonda Johnson, Public Information Officer, Big Horn County
(406) 679-0572

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rjohnson@bighorncountymt.gov

**Big Horn County Health Department Announces
New Order to Prevent Spread of COVID-19
*Masks are required to be worn outside the home***

HARDIN, MONTANA (June 26, 2020) – The Big Horn County Local Health Officer, with the approval of the County Public Health Board, today ordered that all people in Big Horn County must wear face coverings (masks) when outside their homes. This requirement is a result of the increase in COVID-19 cases in Big Horn County. These measures are in addition to the Directives issued by Governor Steve Bullock for the State of Montana. As allowed under the Governor’s Directives, where the local order is more restrictive, the local order shall be followed.

The Big Horn County Commissioners, the Big Horn County Health Board, and the Crow Tribe of Indians are standing in solidarity to promote universal wearing of masks by everyone in Big Horn County, when in public and at risk of coming within six (6) feet of another person.

“As we have seen by the increase in positive cases in Big Horn County over the past couple of weeks, the risk for COVID-19 remains,” said George Real Bird III, Board of County Commissioners and Public Health Board Chairman. “We realize requiring masks may be controversial to some in the current environment, but it is the only proven measure we know that can stop the spread of the virus to our vulnerable population, particularly our elders and the over 50% of our community with preexisting conditions.”

“When cases of COVID-19 are rapidly increasing, such as is currently the case in Big Horn County, it is reasonable to look at known effective strategies for decreasing virus transmission,” said Dr. Greg Holzman, State Medical Officer for Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

“Wearing a face covering is one of the known effective strategies to prevent spread of the virus; staying home is another.”

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Studies and evidence on infection control report that these droplets usually travel around six (6) feet, so the CDC has stated that it important for everyone to practice social distancing (staying at least 6 feet away from other people) and to wear cloth face coverings in public settings. The CDC further notes that people who are infected but are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic play an important part in community spread.

A cloth face covering provides some protection to the wearer, but it can keep the wearer from spreading the virus to others by limiting the release of infected droplets, while providing a strong signal that the wearer cares about others. With the support of local businesses requiring masks, as well as peer or societal pressure to wear masks in public, Big Horn County hopes to slow transmission of the virus as seen in other cities, states, and countries where mask wearing became the norm.

There are some limited exceptions to the requirement to wear masks, as listed below:

- If a person is directed otherwise **in writing** by their healthcare provider;
- If a person is directed otherwise by their employer **in writing** because wearing a mask would endanger the individual's health and welfare. Employers must provide, **in writing**, an explanation of how else the individual may safely mitigate the virus. If an employee is exempted from wearing a face covering due to a medical condition, but is employed in a job involving regular contact with others, the employee should wear a non-restrictive alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, as long as their condition permits it;
- Children age two (2) years or younger are exempt, because of the risk of suffocation. It is recommended that, whenever feasible, children should be left in the care of an appropriate person and only one (1) family member should be out and about for shopping, etc.;
- When the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication, a person who is communicating with a person who is hearing impaired may lower their masks while talking;
- If a person is obtaining a service involving the nose or face for which temporary removal of the face covering is necessary to perform the service;
- Persons who are engaged in outdoor work or recreation, such as swimming, walking, hiking, bicycling, or running, whether alone or with household members, when they are able to maintain a distance of at least six (6) feet from others;
- While outdoors in areas where it is unlikely that they will come within six (6) feet of others.

The Order expands existing guidance for the use of cloth face coverings by the general public when outside the home. It does not substitute for existing guidance about social distancing and handwashing.

Cloth masks can be picked up free of charge at the Big Horn County Public Health Department at 809 N. Custer Ave. in Hardin. The County will also have volunteers distributing masks at local events. Masks are also available for purchase at Sew Queen (665-4207) and Dan's Custom Designs (439-0609) in Hardin. If you know of a person or business selling masks, please contact the Public Information Officer and the County will advertise your masks on our COVID-19 Response Facebook page.

Public Health wishes to remind all residents of Big Horn County of the best ways to prevent the transmission of this virus: stay home; wash your hands thoroughly and often; clean and sanitize frequently touched surfaces and items; wear a mask when in public; stay at least six (6) feet away from other people; and avoid travel out of the County if at all possible. And if you are feeling sick, do not go to work or leave your home; rather, contact your healthcare provider for guidance.

To view the full Order, please visit the Big Horn County website at <https://www.bighorncountymt.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Order-of-BHC-Public-Health-Officer-2020-11.pdf>.

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Big Horn County is the sixth largest county in Montana, at approximately 5,023 square miles, and with a population exceeding 13,000. The local government was established January 13, 1913. Hardin is the County Seat. <https://www.bighorncountymt.gov/> For more information about the County's COVID-19 response, please visit our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/BHCMTResponds>.