



COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This is a living document that will continue to be updated

Q: What has the county done to protect residents from COVID-19?

Teton County is working under a Unified Incident Command involving many agencies throughout the County to make decisions that best ensure the safety and health of the public. The Teton County Health Department works closely with the Teton County Board of Health District Health Officer, Dr. Travis Riddell and the State Health Officer to support all orders that have been issued. Currently, Teton County has closed all government buildings to unrestricted public access in order to protect both staff and the public. The County is still offering services to the public by appointment and curbside service. To contact a department or office, please go to the Teton County webpage to find contact information: <https://www.tetoncountyywy.gov/>

Q: Why hasn't the County closed the airport?

Teton County does not have the authority to close the Jackson Hole Airport. The airport can only be closed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The FAA has been clear in their position that "it does not permit airports to shut down without agency approval." Additionally, the FAA has sent follow up communications to airports stating that airports are not authorized to close due to COVID-19.

Q: Why hasn't the County followed the lead of the town to adopt a Shelter in Place Ordinance?

The Jackson Town Council did adopt an emergency ordinance on Saturday, March 28, 2020 to have residents shelter in place. The Teton District Health Officer issued a countywide order on Tuesday, March 31, 2020 that is similar. The Jackson Town Council must affirm an emergency ordinance within 48 hours. On Tuesday, March 31, 2020, the Jackson Town Council voted to repeal their emergency ordinance and not affirm it as a permanent ordinance. Thus, the Town of Jackson does not currently have any ordinances in effect as to COVID-19.

The Wyoming Legislature has given the power to issue lawful public health orders to medical professionals rather than elected officials. Statewide public health orders are issued solely by the Wyoming State Health Officer. Countywide public health orders are

issued by the District Health Officer, with authorization and direction from the Wyoming State Health Officer.

The Town of Jackson and Teton County have formed the Teton Health District, which is overseen by the Teton District Board of Health. The Teton Health District encompasses all of Teton County including the Town of Jackson. The Board of Health appoints the District Health Officer. The current Teton District Health Officer is Travis Riddell, MD. The State Health Officer is Alexia Harrist, MD. By law, both the State Health Officer and the District Health Officer must be medical doctors.

Q: Why hasn't the county shut down construction sites?

No current orders have prohibited construction from continuing and thus construction sites are allowed to remain open. However, while performing construction operations, the workers must practice physical distancing and adhere to other health and safety recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Q: Why doesn't the County order the County-wide closure of hotels and short-term rentals?

The County does not have the authority to order these closures; only the Wyoming State Health Officer or the District Health Officer operating under the direction and authority of the State Health Officer can order this type of closure in the interest of public health. Further, short-term rentals and hotels are often used by more than just individuals or families on vacation and closure could cause a variety of problems. Many hotel rooms are used by construction workers and other workers, who are working on long-term projects. Hotel rooms are also safety options for individuals who may be suffering from a domestic abuse situation. Hotels are also used by flight crews. Hotels may be used by people seeking to self-isolate. There are many reasons to keep hotels open and functional at this time.

Q: Why doesn't the County prohibit people who own second homes from coming to Teton County?

The Teton District Health Officer issued a recommendation (#4) that those whose primary residence is elsewhere, should remain at or return to their primary residence, in an effort to help flatten the curve. The County cannot prevent individuals from going to a property that they own.

Q: Why does the County Commission defer to the Teton District Health Officer instead of taking matters into their own hands?

The Wyoming Statutes explicitly grant the power to issue public health orders to medical professionals, rather than elected officials. The Wyoming State Health Officer, a medical doctor, authorizes and directs the Teton District Health Officer, also a medical doctor, to issue public health orders. Teton County and the Town of Jackson have formed the Teton Health District which encompasses Teton County, Wyoming, and includes the City of Jackson. The Teton Health District has a Board of Health, that appoints the District Health Officer.

Q: What is the schedule or triggers for reopening businesses?

The State Health Officer and the Teton District Health Officer are monitoring the spread of COVID-19 throughout the mountain west region and are assessing the situation daily. While it is the goal to see businesses reopen as soon as possible, it is also the goal that businesses reopen when it is safe. Currently, the State has an order to keep certain businesses closed until April 17, 2020 and the Federal Government is now recommending closures through April 30, 2020. The State Health Officer and the Teton District Health Officer will look for guidance from the CDC and the U.S. President's Coronavirus Task Force.

Q: Will the County delay the May 10 due date for Property Taxes?

The County does not have the authority to change the property tax payment due dates; those dates are established by the State through State Statute. Any changes would need to originate with the State and would have additional implications. Property tax due dates follow the school year and by assessing taxes now, entities listed on the property tax bill (Teton County Government, Teton County School District, Teton County Library, JH Fire/EMS, Weed and Pest, Teton County Fair, Hospital, etc.) are budgeting to coincide with assessments. Those entities use the billing cycle to project revenue for the next year. If somehow a delay in property tax payments was authorized, those entities wouldn't receive the necessary funding for operations.

2019's property taxes are currently being assessed by Assessor Shinkle. Assessments will go out in April 2020. Property tax bills will go out in August 2020. First half payment is due September 1, 2020 (late after November 10). Second half payment is due March 1, 2021 (late after May 10). Full payment without paying penalties and interest is due December 31, 2020.

Q: When can we anticipate wide-spread novel coronavirus testing?

The Federal Government announced that it will be sending out rapid testing to communities beginning April 1, 2020. Currently, there is a short supply of tests in Teton County (and nationwide) and the hospital can only test those who meet criteria issued by the CDC.

Q: Why hasn't the county ordered people to wear buffs or scarfs over their mouth?

The CDC does not currently recommend the routine use of masks outside of workplace settings (in the community). Most often, spread of respiratory viruses from person-to-person happens among close contact (within 6 feet). CDC recommends everyday preventive actions to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, such as avoiding people who are sick, avoiding touching your eyes or nose, and covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue.

Q: Why doesn't the County test everyone the way that San Miguel County, Colorado has?

The type of testing that San Miguel County, Colorado is different than the tests that are distributed to health departments and hospitals through the CDC. It is a test for antibodies rather than for the virus itself and is a blood test rather than the swabs done for virus testing. It is very expensive and labor and resource intensive and is being managed as a pilot project in San Miguel County.

Q: Why can't local residents use Grand Teton National park for Dispersed Recreation?

Teton County does not have decision making authority over any National Park lands, even those that are within the County. The Grand Teton National Park and Yellowstone National Park Superintendents made the decision to close the parks to the public until further notice.