



## **COVID-19 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

*4/3/2020 - 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.tetoncountyyw.gov/>

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

Teton County does not have the authority to close the Jackson Hole Airport. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has been clear in their position that it does not permit airports to shut down without agency approval. The Jackson Hole Airport will remain open unless directed by the FAA to do otherwise.

### **Q: Why hasn't the County followed the lead of the town to adopt a Stay-at-Home Ordinance?**

The Teton District Health Officer issued a countywide order on Tuesday, March 31, 2020 that is similar to the one adopted by the Jackson Town Council on March 28, 2020. This allowed the Jackson Town Council to repeal their emergency ordinance.

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 District Health Officer does have the authority to issue County public health recommendations.

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?**

The County does not have the authority to prohibit construction activities. In the unincorporated areas of the county, 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.

No current orders have prohibited construction from continuing, however, while performing construction operations, workers are expected to 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. Hotel rooms are often used by construction workers, employees working on long-term projects, victims of domestic abuse needing shelter, flight crews, etc. They also offer an option for people needing to self-isolate due to COVID-19 exposure

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

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

**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's important that they do so only when it's safe. Currently, the State has an order to keep certain businesses closed until April 17, 2020, though that could be extended. 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. The current schedule for assessments and property tax bills remains the same. 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 a delay in property tax payments was authorized, they 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?**

Currently, Teton County is in short supply of tests. The hospital is only testing 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 Teton County Health Department is recommending people use cloth barriers, such as bandanas, buffs, etc. when they are out of their home doing essential activities. It's critical people reserve N95 or medical masks for health care professionals due to national shortages. While using a cloth barrier, it's important not to have a false sense of security and still follow all the guidance for keeping a physical distance of at least 6 feet from others, frequently washing your hands, etc.

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

San Miguel County's testing method is a pilot project and is different than the tests distributed to health departments and hospitals through the CDC. It is a test for antibodies rather than for the virus itself, and the testing method is a two-part blood test rather than the swabs done for virus testing.

**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. National Parks fall under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service and Department of the Interior.