



NEWS ADVISORY

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For immediate release

Mayor Engen Urges Residents to Get Vaccinated Against COVID-19

Health care facilities in Missoula are struggling with capacity, and Mayor John Engen is urging residents of Missoula and Missoula County to get the COVID-19 vaccine if they haven't already.

"Today I spoke with Joyce Dombrowski, chief executive of Providence St. Patrick Hospital, who told me St. Patrick and rural Montana hospitals are all experiencing COVID surges, staffing shortages and patient capacity issues," Engen said. "With the highly infectious Delta variant, stressed and burned-out health care workforce and many people still unvaccinated, their COVID-19 admissions are rising faster than they can keep up.

"These factors are forcing St. Pat's to put their Emergency Room on diversion. Our urgent care and outpatient clinics are also at capacity – and we haven't reached the peak of the latest surge. They are now being asked to take patients from surrounding states, The simplest and easiest way to prevent our health care system from being overrun is by getting vaccinated."

The same situation is at play at Community Medical Center.

"Jim Gillhouse, chief operating officer at Community, tells me that the hospital is extremely concerned about the current situation as well," Engen said. "When our two medical centers are sounding the alarm, I listen."

"On behalf of these hospitals, their staff and vulnerable Missoulians, I'm pleading with you to get vaccinated," Engen said. "If you can save your life, the life of a family member, the life of a neighbor or a stranger by getting a couple of pokes in the arm at no cost, why wouldn't you?"

Thank you to everyone who has already chosen to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. It is truly our best defense against this pandemic. There has been an uptick in residents getting vaccines, but more need to be vaccinated.

“We should be at the tail end of this pandemic, but we’re not. Our hospitals, more than a year-and-a-half into the pandemic, are in the most dire situation they’ve been in to date,” Engen said. “I’m begging you, if you are eligible for a vaccine, get it. We’re open seven days a week at the old Lucky’s Market in Southgate Mall, no appointment is necessary, you pay nothing and you’ll be in and out in no time. And you’ll be saving lives.”

Engen contracted COVID on New Year’s Day and speaks from experience as someone who’s been vaccinated. “My case was, fortunately, mild, but it was very unpleasant. I was lucky. And I got the vaccine as soon as I could. And I’ll get a booster when the time comes.”

In addition to a resurgence of the virus through the Delta variant, hospital workers are in short supply, and those who are working are fatigued.

“These systems are simultaneously resilient and fragile,” Engen said. “It’s up to us to help them serve the community.”

The Missoula City-County Health Department offers COVID-19 vaccinations at certain hours every day at its clinic at Southgate Mall and also offers mobile clinics. Appointments and walk-ups are available. Visit <https://covid19.missoula.co/vaccine-information/> or call 258-INFO.

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