

THE Durango HERALD

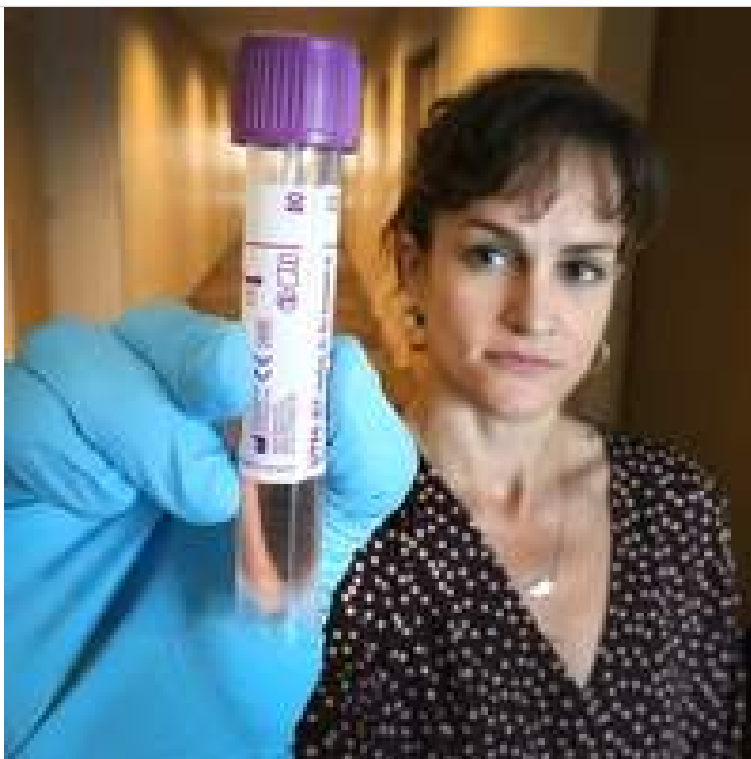
Free article

How is Durango preparing for COVID-19 outbreak?

Librarians are cleaning books, jail guards are identifying quarantine options

By John Livingston (<https://durangoherald.com/staff/51-john-livingston>) Regional sports editor and Liz Weber (<https://durangoherald.com/staff/19303-liz-weber>) New Mexico reporter and Shannon Mullane (<https://durangoherald.com/staff/18979-shannon-mullane>) Durango and Pine River Valley reporter and Bret Hauff (<https://durangoherald.com/staff/21017-bret-hauff>)

Saturday, March 7, 2020 12:40 AM Updated: Wednesday, March 18, 2020 2:10 PM



(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/317235-how-is-durango-preparing-for-covid19-outb>)

T Toggle font size

Select Language ▼

Select Language ▼

As the coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak spreads across the United States – with Colorado reporting eight cases as of Friday afternoon – residents, businesses and government agencies are taking precautions and making preparations for what could be a deadly fight.

In Durango, grocery stores are running low on hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes, health workers are brushing up on emergency management plans and government officials are discussing response efforts should an outbreak occur here.

And they're not alone. While the threat of a COVID-19 outbreak remains low in Southwest Colorado, the flu-like virus has people on high alert. The La Plata County Jail is evaluating segregation and quarantine options, and public libraries are stepping up efforts to clean surfaces and even books.

One of the clearest signs of the community's concerns are the barren shelves usually stocked with hand sanitizer at Walmart, City Market and Albertsons. Employees at the businesses report they were empty this week.

Customers at north City Market have bought up most of the store's disinfectant wipes and household cleaners. Walmart is out of masks and is running low on supplements, rubbing alcohol and antibacterial soap.

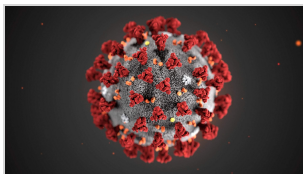
Colorado's first confirmed cases



(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/317235-how-is-durango-preparing-for-covid19-outbreak#>)

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis speaks Tuesday at a news conference about COVID-19, the coronavirus.

Jesse Paul/The Colorado Sun



(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/317235-how-is-durango-preparing-for-covid19-outbreak#>)

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment announced Thursday that the state had its first confirmed cases of COVID-19. As of Friday afternoon, eight cases of COVID-19 had been identified, according to the Colorado Department of Health and Environment. The cases were in the counties of Denver (2), Douglas (3), Eagle (1), El Paso (1) and Summit (1).

This illustration provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in January 2020 shows the coronavirus COVID-19. The virus was identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, China.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

At least five of the cases had an international travel history.

Denver Public Health & Environment warned the number of people testing positive is expected to rise since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is now allowing health providers to test patients on their own without help from county health departments.

There were zero confirmed cases in Archuleta, Montezuma and La Plata counties as of Friday afternoon, according to San Juan Basin and

Montezuma County public health departments.

What we don't know

Carol Huser, a medical doctor and forensic pathologist of more than 30 years, was already thinking about returning to Durango from Florida. If COVID-19 spreads farther through the United States, she might return sooner, she said.

"I think the smaller the population, the better," Huser said.

Proximity to other people is the biggest factor in the spread of a virus, she said.

"The farther you distance yourself from other people ... the fewer people you're around, the better," she said. "If you never get within 10 feet of another person, you're not going to catch a virus at all."

Experts still do not know as much as they would like about COVID-19.

Virus behavior depends on the virus, Huser said.

Experts are still learning about rates of infection, rates of lethality, likelihood of spreading the virus before showing symptoms and the effectiveness of antiviral drugs.

They do not yet know how far the virus travels after a sneeze or cough, or if the virus would interact differently in a high-altitude, semi-arid climate versus other climates.

Some viruses' ability to infect people seems to be affected by heat and humidity, but no one knows if that's true yet for COVID-19, Huser said.

Overall, Huser urged people not to panic. But people of all ages should take it seriously and stay home if they are sick.



(<https://durangoherald.com/article/2020/03/19/how-is-durango-preparing-for-covid19-outbreak/>)

Huser

“If you do get it and you’re young and healthy and get over it, great,” Huser said. “But you still could affect your parents, grandparents ... that might not be as strong as you.”

Subscribe now!

Become a champion of local news

(<https://durangoherald.com/subscribe>)

Subscriptions make it possible to provide readers with in-depth, local journalism. Get access (<https://durangoherald.com/subscribe>) to all of our online content for just \$10 a month. Thank you for subscribing.



(<https://durangoherald.com/subscribe>)

Precautions at the county jail

The close quarters at the La Plata County Jail are ripe for disease to spread, said Capt. Ed Aber, the jail’s top administrator with the La Plata County Sheriff’s Office.

“Anytime somebody has a common cold in the jail, there’s a lot of people who get the common cold,” he said. “If somebody gets the flu, there’s a great potential of that spreading to employees and inmates.”

First steps of avoiding an outbreak in the jail are to identify where people have been before they’re booked, Aber said. If anyone is sick when they’re booked in the jail, that individual will be put into isolation to avoid contact with others.

While the threat of COVID-19 in Colorado remains low, the jail has been reorganizing its housing to provide a separate space for anyone exhibiting symptoms.

Jail administrators have identified cells with independent ventilation systems for potentially infected inmates and are taking steps to increase the frequency of filter changes, Aber said.

The Sheriff’s Office is also boosting its messaging to inmates encouraging people to wash their hands, cover their faces when they cough and report any upper respiratory symptoms to jail medical staff.

The jail does not have an in-house means of testing for COVID-19. Any potential cases must be tested at Mercy Regional Medical Center.

“I think if you look at what is happening throughout the world, this certainly is something that is going to affect us,” Aber said. “We’re in a closed environment. It just takes one person in that closed environment to create a risk for everybody.”

In Montezuma County, law enforcement vehicles are being regularly wiped down with sanitizer.

Between the (book) covers

In public spaces like libraries, people – and their germs – gather. But librarians also have a non-human germ vector to watch: books.



(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/317235-how-is-durango-preparing-for-covid19-outbreak#>)

Ron Schermacher, right, service desk manager at the Ignacio Community Library, and Libby DeHaan, library assistant, clean returned books and DVDs on Thursday at the library. Residents, health workers and government officials are taking precautions and making preparations for a possible outbreak of the coronavirus COVID-19 across Southwest Colorado. No cases have been reported in La Plata or Archuleta counties.

Jerry McBride/Durango Herald

Groups of libraries regularly pack up books, send them to a courier service where they get packaged and sent to other libraries. But novels are like money. They can be pretty dirty.

“It’s important to take precautions – not to overreact – but to take precautions before that first case is reported,” said Marcia Vining, Ignacio Community Library director.

In Ignacio, staff have cleaned book covers as a matter of protocol for over a year. With the flu season and COVID-19, the library added light switches, door handles and other high-contact surfaces to its cleaning list.

Pine River Library staff in Bayfield also clean books and high-contact surfaces, even stocking cleaning wipes and masks to give to patrons when necessary. Durango Public Library does not clean its books, but it does thoroughly clean the building and is watching CDC guidelines.

Experts do not know how long the virus remains active without a human host because COVID-19 is so new.

The CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#protect>) said coronaviruses, a name that simply refers to the shape of the virus, have poor survivability on surfaces and there is likely a low risk of spread from products or packaging.

After numerous people who attended a Buddhist temple in Hong Kong fell ill, samples from restroom faucets and other surfaces tested positive for coronavirus, according to a New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/02/health/coronavirus-how-it-spreads.html>) article.

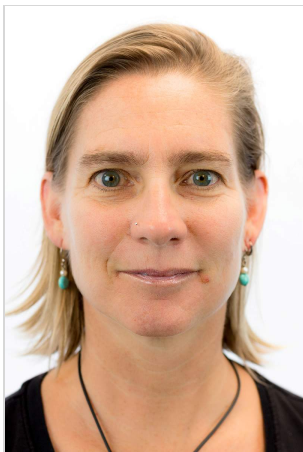
Other coronaviruses remained on metal, glass and plastic for two hours to nine days, according to a German study ([https://www.journalofhospitalinfection.com/article/S0195-6701\(20\)30046-3/fulltext](https://www.journalofhospitalinfection.com/article/S0195-6701(20)30046-3/fulltext)) published in February.

Surface disinfectants effectively inactivated the coronaviruses, the study said.

“Please respect other people, and either don’t come in sick or wear a mask,” Vining said.

Health agencies review emergency plan

While there have been zero confirmed cases of the virus in Southwest Colorado, San Juan Basin Public Health continues to evaluate the risk of an outbreak with its emergency management plan for La Plata County, said Claire Ninde, SJBPH’s director of communications.



“The purpose of our plan is to promote a system to save lives, protect public health and environment, alleviate damage and hardship, and reduce future vulnerability within Archuleta and La Plata counties,” Ninde said in an email to *The Durango Herald*.

SJBPH’s emergency plan involves different levels of activation, depending on the emergency. As of Thursday afternoon, the health department had activated its emergency plan at a Level 2 for enhanced response, the middle of three levels, with Level 1 reserved for a high severity pandemic or a major natural hazard disaster. Level 2 involves opening a Department

(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/347235-how-is-durango-preparing-for-covid19-outbreak#>)

Ninde

Operations Center and implementing its Incident Command System to increase coordinated response efforts in the community.



(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/317235-how-is-durango-preparing-for-covid19-outbreak/>)

Dr. Jennifer Rupp, left, infectious disease physician with Four Corners Infectious Disease and Internal Medicine at Mercy Regional Medical Center, and Keri McCune, infection prevention program manager at Mercy, demonstrate Friday how a COVID-19 test kit works.

Jerry McBride/Durango Herald

While the health department is responsible for handling much of the community response coordination, Mercy Regional Medical Center handles the testing for COVID-19. Similar to a flu test, a COVID-19 test is obtained by a swab of the patient's nasal canal and then transported from the Mercy lab to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, said Dr. Jennifer Rupp, infectious disease physician with Four Corners Infectious Disease and Internal Medicine at Mercy.

In the event someone in the community tested positive for COVID-19, San Juan Basin Public Health has a series of protocols in place, Ninde said. The health department would first notify regional medical providers, release the information to the media and continue to share the news via social media, its website, radio and television.

Ninde added the health department has heard rumors of sell-outs of hand sanitizer and disinfectant in stores but could not verify where. She encouraged concerned residents to check the website SJBPH established for COVID-19 updates (<https://sjbpublichealth.org/coronavirus/>).

Use the wipes

The city of Durango has taken precautionary steps to provide additional disinfecting wipes and gels in public and employee areas.



(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/317235-how-is-durango-preparing-for-covid19-outbreak#>)

Shelves where cleaning supplies normally sit had been cleared out Wednesday at the Durango Walmart.

Jerry McBride/Durango Herald

City custodians have been directed to maintain “strict cleaning and disinfection” of city facilities, according to a news release.

The municipality is working with San Juan Basin Public Health and other local, state and federal partners to stay up-to-date on the spread of the disease.

Hand sanitizers and disinfecting wipes will be available on Durango Public Transit, according to the news release.

The Durango Community Recreation Center, which had about 400,000 visits in 2018, is sanitized at the end of each day, said Cathy Metz, Parks and Recreation director. The facility has for years offered wipes to patrons to clean workout equipment and mats, she said.

“This is something that’s really important to us, having the facility clean and welcoming, irrespective of COVID-19,” Metz said.

A toll on tourism

Durango thrives on tourism, but global tourism has taken a hit as the COVID-19 outbreak spreads worldwide (<https://durangoherald.com/articles/313988>).

Travel restrictions related to COVID-19 have caused at least one person to call a local business and ask about canceling a trip to Durango, said Theresa Graven, spokeswoman for Visit Durango.

The organization has for about a week provided preemptive support to local partners, Graven said. That includes providing business owners with a consolidated platform for information about the virus and best practices if someone is exposed to COVID-19.



(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/317235-how-is-durango-preparing-for-covid19-outbreak#>)

The Durango Welcome Center, which had 120,000 visitors last year, has been wiping surfaces with disinfectant and fielding questions from visitors about the coronavirus.

Durango Herald file

The main message to tourism businesses has been for people to protect themselves from the virus by washing their hands, not touching their face and staying home when they're feeling sick.

"People don't have vacation time and aren't able to stay home from work, and that's a problem," Graven said. "People need to feel OK to stay home when they're sick."

About 1.3 million people visited the region in 2019

(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/306689-records-on-track-to-be-set-in-2019>), Visit Durango estimated in December. The Durango Welcome Center last year had 120,000 visitors.

Employees at the Durango Welcome Center have been wiping surfaces with disinfectant and fielding questions about the virus from concerned visitors.

"We're not concerned about visitors coming here," Graven said. "There are no travel restrictions to Colorado, so most international travelers should not be discouraged to plan vacations in Colorado."

Schools take precautions

Local schools are also reminding families to take proper precautions.

The Montezuma-Cortez School District is asking that students stay home when sick. The district cited guidelines from Children's Hospital Colorado (https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/DEHS_ChildCare_HowSickistooSickIllnessPolicy_English.pdf) for when children should be kept home. Children exhibiting mild respiratory or cold symptoms (like a stuffy nose or mild cough) can go to school, but students with high fever or who are vomiting or exhibiting "flu-like" symptoms should stay home.

Wide world of Colorado sports

Professional sporting events in Japan and Italy are being played in front of empty arenas and stadiums. So far in Colorado, that is not the case, though the Colorado High School Activities Association has communicated regularly with member schools during the past week about potential precautions at next week's state tournament basketball games.

The Ignacio High School boys and girls basketball teams will compete in regionals this weekend with the chance to reach the CHSAA Class 2A state tournaments at the Budweiser Events Center in Loveland for Great 8 tournament games beginning Thursday.

"I am in contact with multiple state and local agencies in regards to any changes that may occur with CHSAA culminating championships," CHSAA commissioner Rhonda Blandford-Green said in an email to member schools. "The state and local agencies as well as our facility administrators have me on their 'high alert' communications. If there are closures, logistics will be communicated to the membership and posted to (CHSAANOW.com) immediately. ... Our plan is to conduct the championship events unless directed by state agencies and/or facility administration of cancellations."

Similarly, Fort Lewis College has received communication from Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference Commissioner Chris Graham. There currently are no plans to alter spring sports schedules, as FLC softball and women's lacrosse season is now underway.

"We haven't even thought of canceling games at this point," said FLC Athletic Director Brandon Leimbach. "We are being diligent about people's hygiene and making sure people are doing the right things."

As high schools also begin spring sports competition this week, athletic departments are beginning to think about contingency plans if upcoming games are postponed or canceled because of coronavirus, said Durango 9-R Athletic Director Ryan Knorr.

"I would assume it would be comparable to a snow day," Knorr said. "On a snow day, we are not allowed to hold practice or compete without CHSAA pre-approval, which would only happen on a state playoff or regional event that is time sensitive. It could really throw a wrench in spring sports if this virus ramps up in our state/area. I would imagine CHSAA would decrease competition minimums for playoffs or possibly flex dates. I don't see them

flexing more than a week or so based on their calendar. Could be interesting to see how this unfolds. Fingers crossed our state and region stay unscathed, but I'm not sure that's possible at this point."

You might also like

(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/348698>)

**reported at popular
burger joint in downtown
Durango**
(<https://durangoherald.com>)

Oct 8, 2020

(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/348345>)

**Durango; 20-year-old
taken into custody**
(<https://durangoherald.com>)

Oct 7, 2020

(<https://durangoherald.com/articles/349810>)

review
(<https://durangoherald.com>)

Oct 11, 2020

Follow these topics

COLORADO ([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/48275/COLORADO/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/48275/COLORADO/EN/))

LA PLATA COUNTY

([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/355606467/LA%20PLATA%20COUNTY/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/355606467/LA%20PLATA%20COUNTY/EN/))

CLAIRE NINDE

([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/1314922002/CLAIRE%20NINDE/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/1314922002/CLAIRE%20NINDE/EN/))

THERESA GRAVEN

([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/1984835488/THERESA%20GRAVEN/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/1984835488/THERESA%20GRAVEN/EN/))

MERCY REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/1112018162/MERCY%20REGIONAL%20MEDICAL%20CENTER/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/1112018162/MERCY%20REGIONAL%20MEDICAL%20CENTER/EN/))

ED ABER ([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/4085687440/ED%20ABER/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/4085687440/ED%20ABER/EN/))

SAN JUAN BASIN

([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/3310990247/SAN%20JUAN%20BASIN/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/3310990247/SAN%20JUAN%20BASIN/EN/))

DURANGO WELCOME CENTER

([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/3037047797/DURANGO%20WELCOME%20CENTER/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/3037047797/DURANGO%20WELCOME%20CENTER/EN/))

PINE RIVER ([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/2744898521/PINE%20RIVER/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/2744898521/pine%20river/en/))

COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/3283720632/COLORADO%20DEPARTMENT%20OF%20PUBLIC%20HEALTH%20AND%20ENVIRONMENT/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/3283720632/colorado%20department%20of%20public%20health%20and%20environment/en/))

JENNIFER RUPP
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/3124475723/JENNIFER%20RUPP/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/3124475723/jennifer%20rupp/en/))

MONTEZUMA COUNTY
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/2472913499/MONTEZUMA%20COUNTY/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/2472913499/montezuma%20county/en/))

MARCIA VINING
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/2023296534/MARCIA%20VINING/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/2023296534/marcia%20vining/en/))

KERI MCCUNE ([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/272445006/KERI%20MCCUNE/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/272445006/keri%20mccune/en/))

RON SCHERMACHER
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/2077746134/RON%20SCHERMACHER/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/2077746134/ron%20schermacher/en/))

LIBBY DEHAAN
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/3819384063/LIBBY%20DEHAAN/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/3819384063/libby%20dehaan/en/))

FORT LEWIS COLLEGE
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/2601481481/FORT%20LEWIS%20COLLEGE/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/2601481481/fort%20lewis%20college/en/))

OPERATIONS CENTER
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/1120800750/OPERATIONS%20CENTER/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/1120800750/operations%20center/en/))

BUDDHIST TEMPLE
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/2258015587/BUDDHIST%20TEMPLE/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/2258015587/buddhist%20temple/en/))

ATHLETIC CONFERENCE
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/587197489/ATHLETIC%20CONFERENCE/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/587197489/athletic%20conference/en/))

CHRIS GRAHAM
([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/ENTITIES/3535634427/CHRIS%20GRAHAM/EN/](https://durangoherald.com/entities/3535634427/chris%20graham/en/))

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

([HTTPS://DURANGOHERALD.COM/CALENDAR](https://durangoherald.com/calendar))

[CLICK HERE](https://www.spingo.com/submit/?partnerid=574)

([HTTPS://WWW.SPINGO.COM/SUBMIT/?PARTNERID=574](https://www.spingo.com/submit/?partnerid=574)) TO ADD YOUR
EVENT

Area Events

This service is currently deactivated.
We apologize for the inconvenience.

Add Events

(<https://www.spingo.com/submit/?partnerid=574>)

(<https://durangoherald.com/calendar>)