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MEDIA STATEMENT

Montana Hospital Association issues statement in support of statewide mask mandate

(Helena, Mont., July 15, 2020) – Following a recent surge of COVID-19 cases in Montana and the announcement of a statewide mask mandate by Governor Steve Bullock today, the Montana Hospital Association issued the followed statement:

"We want to keep our economy open and ensure every Montanan has access to the medical care they need," said Rich Rasmussen, president and chief executive officer for the Montana Hospital Association. **"We have grave concerns about our ability to treat all patients as we head into our state's sickest season—fall and winter flu season—if we cannot effectively contain the virus this summer. Until we have a vaccine, wearing a mask is among the most simple and effective things we can do to keep the virus from shutting down our state and overwhelming our healthcare system."**

Montana today recorded its highest number of new cases in a single day and its highest number of active hospitalizations since the start of the public health emergency, including 8 new hospitalizations reported in the past 24 hours. The case growth rate for Montana is currently twice that of the rest of the United States, doubling every two weeks compared to four weeks for the U.S. at large.

The Montana Hospital Association has advocated for mask-wearing as a strategy to safely reopen the state's economy and resume day-to-day life since the stay-at-home order was lifted on April 26. MHA launched a public awareness campaign promoting physical distancing and mask-wearing featuring actor Jeff Bridges in

early May, and last week announced the distribution of 45,000 cloth face coverings to the public free of charge through a partnership with the Montana Department of Commerce.

About MHA

The Montana Hospital Association (MHA) is a nonprofit organization with more than eighty members that provide the full spectrum of healthcare services, including hospital inpatient and outpatient services, skilled nursing facilities, home health, hospice, physician services, assisted living, senior housing and insurance services. MHA is the principal advocate for the interests of its members in their efforts to improve the health status of the communities they serve and to make Montana a "Top 10 Healthy State."

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