

COVID-19 Report to Members ~ July 17, 2020

Reports are sent on Mondays and Thursdays, unless there's breaking news.

Editor's note ~ Apologies for the delivery delay of Thursday's Update. We experienced technical difficulties.

Reimbursement & Policy

Treasure Valley leaders, health districts call for masks

On Tuesday morning, hospital and physician leaders in the Treasure Valley held a press conference to inform the public about the current COVID-19 situation and ask Idahoans to be vigilant in social distancing, hand washing and wearing face coverings. They also urged residents to contact elected officials to mandate face coverings to help stop community spread.

Saint Alphonsus and St. Luke's Health Systems, West Valley Medical Center, Primary Health, and Saltzer Medical Group are part of a healthcare collaborative formed to share information, best practices, data and supplies in response to rising COVID-19 cases in the region. They spoke as a united force and expressed a strong need to share their message with the community that providers in the area are seeing an alarming increase of confirmed cases in the Treasure Valley.

A few of the most sobering points shared included:

- In the first 100 days of the coronavirus outbreak, Idaho had 5,552 confirmed cases. For the first two weeks in July, we have over 5,000.
- In two weeks, Saint Alphonsus has gone from 3 patients to 41. In one month, they moved from 25 colleagues in quarantine to 126, impacting their ability to care for the community.
- At West Valley Medical Center, the downward trajectory for supplies is very concerning. Inpatients have increased from one to five to seven per week and they have had to divert patients in the past few weeks due to staffing issues.
- Dr. Steven Nemerson from Saint Alphonsus says in one month, he predicts a doubling of patients and that by Labor Day, 50% of the total inpatient volume will be COVID-19 if we don't change the trend.
- The St. Lukes ICU is currently operating at 130% of normal capacity.
- At Primary Health, the huge spike in testing positivity rates and massive increase in daily calls are overwhelming primary care providers.

Despite the alarming trends, the message of healthcare leaders was positive. Chris Roth, CEO for St. Luke's Health System, concluded that, "This is a serious situation. We are not panicking. We are not in crisis. We are taking care of everybody who needs care. But August will be too late to act." Each coalition member emphasized that we can change course if we all do our part, including elected officials.

Health District Orders Face Coverings for All Ada County

By Tuesday afternoon, it became clear that Central District Health (CDH) board members understood the need to take immediate action to slow the spread of COVID-19. The CDH board voted to add a requirement for face masks in all of Ada County to their previous public health order for Ada County to move back to many of the guidelines in Idaho's Stage 3 for COVID-19 response. After an update from Dr. Steven Nemerson, the board had a robust discussion of the current situation and implications of an order requiring face coverings. The topic included discussion around the ability of the board to enforce such an order and the potential for unintended consequences. The board voted to implement the order with only one member voting in opposition. The City of Boise already had a face covering order in place but the new order would expand the requirement to the rest of the county, including the population in Meridian, Star, Eagle, Kuna and Garden City.

IRS extends community health needs assessment deadline

Tuesday, the IRS announced it has [extended the deadline](#) for tax-exempt hospitals to meet the community health needs assessment obligations. In acknowledgement of the pandemic's impact on hospitals, the IRS is allowing hospitals that are due to complete their assessment between April 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020 to have until December 31, 2020 to comply. Hospitals using the extension should state they are relying on the extension in the narrative of Part V.C. of Schedule H (Form 990) so it is clear they are not failing to meet the requirements.

Understanding private coverage testing requirements

On July 7, HHS [released information](#) that helps explain the private coverage requirements of COVID-19 testing under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES). There are tables for:

- Group Health Plan and Health Insurance Coverage, Non-Emergent Care
- Group Health Plan and Health Insurance Coverage, Emergency Care
- Uninsured – Testing and Treatment

Each table includes information for both in-network and out-of-network services on coverage, types of testing covered, out-of-pocket liability, provider balance billing, and pricing.

Quality & Patient Safety

Updated infection prevention recommendations from CDC

Updated recommendations from the CDC were posted yesterday [covering infection prevention and control recommendation](#) for healthcare workers. The information covers both routine prevention and practices as well as when working with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients. The update addresses:

- patient placement;
- PPE use, training and allocation;
- aerosol generating procedures;
- collection of diagnostic respiratory specimens;
- management of visitor access; and
- environmental infection control.

Virtual Meetings, Education & Updates

Telemedicine Series

Project ECHO is hosting a 10-week [Lifehacks for Telemedicine](#) series designed to foster peer-to-peer learning. The series includes specific topic presentations, including reimbursement and best practices as well as discussion panels with case presenters and subject matter experts.

Sessions begin Wednesday, July 22 – 10a-11a MT / 9a-10a PAC

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