

Reimbursement & Policy

First variant infection found in Idaho

On Friday, the Department of Health and Welfare and Southwest District Health **reported** the first reported COVID-19 case with a known variant in Idaho. Lab testing confirmed the B.1.351 variant (also known as the South African variant) in an adult male living in southwest Idaho who recently traveled internationally. As of Friday, there have been 19 infections with this variant in 10 states. Epidemiologists will work to identify any close contacts of the infected individual to track additional Idaho cases.

Idaho vaccine policy, shipment and process update

CVAC, Idaho's COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee, is sending **recommendations** for several additional clarifications to Group 2 and the results of a preliminary vote on the approach the committee would use to prioritize Group 3 to the Governor. The votes are recommendations that are subject to approval, rejection, or modification by Governor Little.

The committee's recent recommendations for Group 2 include:

- Not including CPR, AED, and basic life support instructors; Red Cross Emergency Operations Center workers; Social Security administration staff unable to telework and serving vulnerable populations; and faculty and staff providing face-to-face services in postsecondary settings in Group 2.1.
- Not including plumbers, pipefitters, steamfitters, Bureau of Reclamation dam workers, "on-site" apartment staff, Airbnb hosts, hotel workers, and media covering the legislative session in person and other "frontline" reporters in Group 2.3.
- Clarifying that janitorial and cleaning staff should be included in the sector in which they work.
- Including flight crews in Group 2.3.

Regarding Group 3, CVAC discussed on Friday how to prioritize the group which includes "high risk" people ages 16-64 and other essential workers not already covered in prior groups. The committee took a preliminary vote to use age groups as the basis for prioritizing this group; however, that could change in future meetings.

In other vaccine news, DHW Director Dave Jeppesen **announced** on Friday via his blog that the state is working on a vaccine pre-registration solution to match Idahoans with vaccine providers.

Last week's vaccine weather-related shipment delays for both Moderna and Pfizer doses will be resolved today with all delayed shipments arriving in Idaho. This week's shipment is slated to be on time. Also this week, Idaho will see an increase of 3,510 Pfizer vaccine doses and an increase of 10,000 doses to Idaho's Pharmacy Partnership Program participants.

Idaho currently ranks 7th in the US for percentage of distributed vaccines administered. For more information, visit the [Idaho Vaccine Transparency Dashboard](#).

Quality & Patient Safety

Vaccine data may reduce need for ultra-cold storage

Pfizer and BioNTech have **submitted new data** to the FDA which could result in new vaccine storage protocols. The data demonstrates vaccine stability when stored at temperatures more commonly found in pharmaceutical freezers (-25 C to -15 C / -13 F to 5 F).

If the agency approves the information submitted, it could make way for a change to the EUA which would allow vials to be stored at these lower temperatures for a total of two weeks. This change could help facilitate immunizations in more areas where ultra-low temperature storage is not available.

Until the data has been reviewed by the FDA and the EUA is updated, the current storage protocol remain in place:

The labels for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine, including the EUA label in the U.S., state that the vaccine must be stored in an ultra-cold freezer at temperatures between -80 C and -60 C (-112 F to -76 F). It can remain stored at these temperatures for up to 6 months. The vaccines are shipped in a specially-designed thermal container that can be used as temporary storage for a total of up to 30 days by refilling with dry ice every five days. Before mixing with a saline diluent, the vaccine may also be refrigerated for up to five days at standard refrigerator temperature, between 2 C and 8 C (36 F and 46 F). If approved, the option to store at -25 C to -15 C (-13 F to 5 F) for two weeks would be in addition to this five-day option to store at standard refrigerator temperature. The vaccine is administered at room temperature by medical staff.

Vaccine safety data released

After administration of 13.8 million vaccine doses, the **CDC has reported** both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are showing "reassuring safety profiles."

The CDC stated 6,994 adverse events were reported to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) between December 14 and January 13. About 91% of those reports were for non-serious events including headache (22.4%), fatigue (16.5%), and dizziness (16.5%). Reports regarding anaphylaxis were rare and totaled 4.5 cases per million administered doses. Of those receiving vaccines, 113 deaths, including 78 in long-term care facilities, were reported; however, information from death certificates, autopsy reports, medical records and/or clinical descriptions did not suggest any causal relationship to the vaccination and were consistent with expected all-cause mortality rates.

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