

COVID-19 Report to Members ~ August 17, 2021

Reports are sent on Tuesdays, unless there's breaking news.

Cases, vaccines both increase

It hardly seems possible that just 18 months ago, few Americans had ever heard of coronaviruses – that large family of viruses that existed long before COVID-19 emerged. Today, rising positivity rates, mutated variants, nursing shortages, hospital capacity surges, and vaccines invariably work their way into nearly every conversation – along with a lot of emotion.

These conversations are not just happening in Bonners Ferry, Burley and Boise. They're happening in communities all across the country where hospitals are full, staffing is short, and people are debating whether or not vaccines should be required. And while we all have a stake in getting this pandemic under control, the healthcare sector continues to shoulder a growing burden.

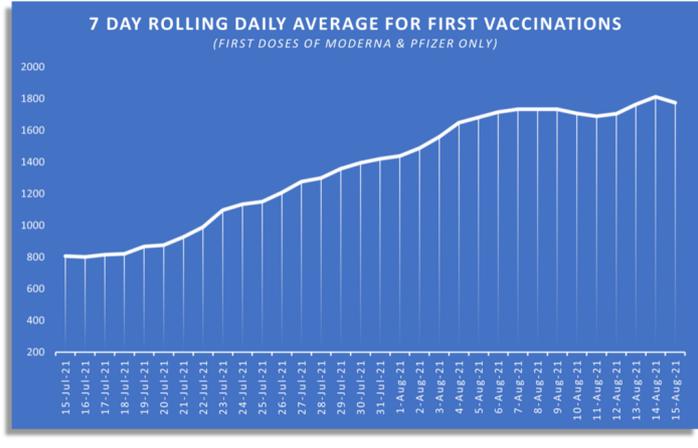
Most of Idaho's indicators are moving in the wrong direction – including 813 new cases on Monday which is the highest since mid-January. The push to get Idahoans vaccinated hasn't been more urgent. Hospitalizations are quickly nearing the December peaks for both med/surg and ICU beds with multiple hospitals pausing procedures requiring overnight stays. Large events, county fairs, and schools are also resuming which is likely to impact those trends event more, adding to **"a delta-fueled COVID-19 fire raging out of control from coast to coast."**

Over the last several days, Governor Little has **"doubled down"** on his call for Idahoans to get vaccinated as the delta variant spreads and nearly all of the hospitalizations and deaths in Idaho are among the unvaccinated. He encouraged business leaders at the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce's meeting yesterday to continue communicating the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine as well as look for **ways to facilitate vaccinations for their employees.**

For overworked hospital staff, watching those who chose not to get vaccinated suffer from a preventable illness, the din of political grandstanding, disinformation, fear-mongering and militant lobbying by those using the pandemic for fundraising can be too much. Some are struggling with compassion-fatigue while others consider leaving their professions.

The Governor's efforts, pleas from respected healthcare leaders, and the efforts of many businesses have sparked an increase in Idaho's vaccination rate. The seven-day rolling average for first vaccinations has more than doubled since mid-July (see chart below). And, just like the Governor, we should all "double down" on our efforts to encourage our fellow Idahoans to be vaccinated as a way to prevent needless deaths and hospitalizations.

We continue to be in awe of all that our members do every day. The resiliency, compassion, and dedication you show is inspiring. We will keep sharing with leaders the immense sacrifices being made and the realities of the pandemic's lasting impact. Thank you for all you do!



Reimbursement & Policy

Hospitals encouraged to submit OSHA comments

In June, OSHA (the Occupational Safety and Health Administration) issued an Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) requiring hospitals and other healthcare employers to take certain steps to protect workers. While that's a laudable goal, IHA is joining AHA and hospitals around the country to let OSHA know that these efforts do not align with CDC guidance and undercut the work done during the pandemic to keep workers safe.

Citing conflicts between the ETS requirements and CDC guidelines hospitals are currently following, we are asking OSHA to withdraw the ETS or at the very least not make it permanent.

OSHA is accepting comments through August 20 at 3p MT. AHA has crafted a **sample comment letter** to use. Please refer to Docket No. OSHA-2020-0004 when you submit your letter via **www.regulations.gov**.

FEMA coverage extended throughout 2021

In late breaking news, President Biden has extended the 100% FEMA coverage for emergency protective measures through the end of the year. This could allow hospitals to receive 100% reimbursement for specific needs related to the increasing case loads including temporary workers or additional hires. Hospitals must request specific capabilities (i.e. screeners) through the Idaho Office of Emergency Management. Additional details on the process are available **here**.

Quality & Patient Safety

Third dose recommended for immunocompromised patients

Last week, the FDA and CDC released a new **vaccine recommendation** for those who are immunocompromised. The recommended protocol is to have patients receive a third dose at least 28 days after the second dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. Immunocompromised people include those who have:

- been receiving active cancer treatment for tumors or cancers of the blood;
- received an organ transplant and are taking medicine to suppress the immune system;
- received a stem cell transplant within the last two years or are taking medicine to suppress the immune system;
- moderate or severe primary immunodeficiency (such as DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome);
- advanced or untreated HIV infection; and
- are undergoing active treatment with high-dose corticosteroids or other drugs that may suppress your immune response.

CMS also issued an update to let providers know that there is **no cost to beneficiaries** to receive the third dose. Today, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare said that patients could receive this third dose wherever vaccines are available and do not need a prescription to do so.



Hear the latest vaccine testimony from Cory - an Idaho agriculture worker.

Virtual Meetings & Education

ECHO Idaho resumes COVID learning sessions

This ECHO Idaho's series provides clinicians an opportunity to learn the latest and most dependable information about variants, pediatric patients, vaccines and boosters, prevention and behavioral health ramifications. Connect with Idaho's foremost experts and frontline colleagues across the state to get strategic advice.

COVID Sessions

Monthly on the First and Third Tuesday ~ 12p MTN / 11a PAC

Register

Grant opportunity for hospitals

Public and nonprofit hospitals are among those organizations that can apply for a portion of \$500 million in grant funding. Grants can be used to expand access to testing and vaccines, rural services, or to improve health outcomes and access to care. The grants are being issued by the Department of Agriculture. For information on applying for funding, plan to join one of two informational webinars below..

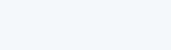
Grant webinars

Thursday, August 19 - **Register**

Wednesday, August 25 - **Register**

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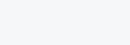
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