

Editor's note

Due to a technical issue with the application we use to send out the COVID Update, we were unable to distribute it yesterday.

Reimbursement & Policy

Federal mandate for healthcare workers paused

Last week, CMS [published a memo](#) stating they will not enforce the COVID vaccine mandate for healthcare workers.

The decision comes on the heels of two district court preliminary injunctions against the implementation and enforcement of the CMS rule. Idaho is a party in one of the court cases which was heard in Louisiana. CMS has appealed both the decisions but is suspending any activities related to the rule pending future developments. Facilities must not be surveyed for compliance with the rule while the injunctions are in place.

In related news, a federal judge in Georgia issued a nationwide injunction of the federal contractor vaccine mandate yesterday. Idaho had also joined in this lawsuit. At this time, all three federal vaccine mandates involving non-federal employees are currently not being enforced as further court action is pending.

Funding available to address COVID health disparities

IDHW is providing funding for hospitals and other community organizations to address health disparities among high-risk, underserved, and rural populations.

Through this rapid funding opportunity, \$5.2 million is available to support programs for those communities with a disproportionate rate of COVID, as well as increased barriers to testing, treatment, and vaccination. Awards will be based on the population size the organization serves, with a minimum award of \$25,000 and maximum of \$750,000.

Allowable activities for this opportunity are:

- Provide education, assistance, and support to mitigate risks, transmission, and long-lasting impacts of COVID as it relates to social determinant of health needs of underserved, high risk populations.
- Provide education, assistance, and support to mitigate impacts, risk, and transmission and encourage vaccination and testing among migrant and seasonal farm workers.
- Convene and facilitate multi-sector partnerships to support and address mental and behavioral health needs of school-aged children and youth.
- Fund Critical Access Hospitals (CAH) and Rural Health Clinics (RHC) for COVID support and response.

The application deadline is January 10 with award notifications set out no later than January 28. The [funding announcement](#) includes additional details, a guidance document, workplan template, key dates, and more.

Resources & Information

Omicron updates on testing and booster effectiveness

As of yesterday, the CDC reported that [19 states](#) have detected at least one case caused by the Omicron variant. While Idaho has yet to report a case, both Washington and Utah are among those states which have.

While more data is needed to understand how Omicron compares to other variants of concern, the CDC did release a [Health Advisory](#) last week which provides information for laboratories on when to send specimens to the CDC for sequencing.

In the weekly media update, IDHW's Bureau of Laboratories Director, Dr. Christopher Ball, provided an [update on state testing](#) (note-video starts at 10:28) and how the state is positioned to detect the Omicron variant through the robust COVID sequencing program that has been put in place. The bureau recently sent information to labs, asking them to watch for a particular PCR profile when testing which may indicate the new variant.

For providers, the FDA updated a resource which lists [which tests may and may not be impacted by the Omicron variant](#).

Today, Pfizer released preliminary findings on the [effectiveness of their vaccine against the Omicron variant](#). While the two-dose regiment offered protection against the virus, adding the booster dose provided a 25-fold increase in neutralization titers which protect against the virus over the two-dose regiment.

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