



NEWS RELEASE--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Case surges overwhelm public health efforts across Idaho

IDAHO – South Central Public Health District, Central District Health, Southwest District Health, and the Panhandle Health District warn case surges in the last month have created backlogs and delays for their disease investigation teams, making it impossible to contact all new reported cases or those individual’s close-contacts.

Disease investigation remains a top priority for public health. However, as cases have flooded into the state, tripling daily averages in some districts, public health is asking for the community’s help.

“We are committed to doing our part in public health,” said Katherine Hoyer, Public Information Officer at Panhandle Health District. “But the reality we are facing is that levels of community transmission are making the critical work of investigation and contact tracing diluted. Simply put, we need the cooperation of our community members to do all they can to reduce their risk and protect themselves, their loved ones and fellow community members,” said Hoyer.

With the latest surge in cases, some health districts have been forced to prioritize investigative calls by age, to ensure they are reaching the people most at risk for severe symptoms and those most likely to spread the disease.

Because of the backlogs, public health districts report a growing number of people are not getting a call from their offices and urge anyone who is awaiting a test

result or who receives a positive test result to take their own proactive measures to protect themselves and those around them.

“We have to rely on everyone we don’t speak with to act responsibly on their own. That means isolating while waiting for test results and, if positive, warning all of their close-contacts that they need to quarantine right away,” said Doug Doney, Acting Director for SWDH.

Anyone awaiting a test result should:

- Stay home and monitor your health – stay away from others in your household whenever possible. Watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath or other symptoms of COVID-19. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure.
- Think about the people you have recently been around and in what environments.
- Answer the phone call from the health department if they are able to reach out to you.
- Helpful Resource: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/php/318271-A_FS_KeyStepsWhenWaitingForCOVID-19Results_3.pdf

If you test positive you should:

- Stay home except to get medical care; do not visit public places.
- Take care of yourself – get rest, stay hydrated.
- Stay in touch with your doctor – seek care if you have any emergency warning signs or if you think it’s an emergency.
- Contact those with whom you have had close contact with to let them know they may have been exposed to COVID-19.
- Avoid public transportation, ride-sharing or taxis.
- Helpful Resource: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html>

In the Panhandle Health District, over 100 cases are coming in daily, the testing positivity and the testing demand continue to increase. The District is in a difficult position and cannot sustainably have staff continue to work after-hours. This is compounded by a stressful work environment where the public is, at times, resistant to the District’s help.

Due to the increased amount of daily cases that the District is receiving, they are focusing on case investigation by contacting those who tested positive and asking them to follow-up with their close contacts. This will allow staff to contact additional

cases in a timely manner, but close contacts of those cases will not be called by PHD. This is temporary and normal case investigation and contact tracing will resume when they are able.

“We are able to report over 100 cases per day, but that is only what we are able to get into data entry,” said Hoyer. “Some days there may be double that amount of cases and our staff is struggling to just keep our heads above water. We want the public to have an accurate idea of what is occurring in our community while sustaining a modified case investigation.”

In South Central Public Health District, more than three times the number of cases were reported in October compared to any other month so far. Investigators are clearing about 300 cases a week, but receiving well over a thousand. Since Monday, November 2nd, SCPHD has received more than 200 cases reported each day.

“Our actions have consequences. We need to focus on our common goals; keep people healthy, keep businesses and schools open, and keep our hospitals running,” said Melody Bowyer, SCPHD Director. “To do that, we need to work together to bring our cases down.”

In Southwest District Health, this week SWDH has averaged 200 new cases reported a day. The more new cases means the less monitoring or close contact investigations we can complete. On average, we have more than doubled and nearly tripled our caseload with no increase in staffing.

“We desperately need the community’s help to dial back the numbers. The investigations team is doing our very best to keep up with the demand, including working overtime, but with the drastic increase in positive cases in such a short time, we need the help of the public to try to keep the cases down.” said Jaime Aanensen, Environmental and Community Health Division Administrator.

In Central District Health, cases related to long-term care facilities and schools are receiving priority for investigation and contact tracing among the latest surge in cases. This week, Ada County will well surpass a record 1,500 cases reported in one week, set back in July. CDH’s more rural counties are also seeing troubling increases. CDH is asking its residents to consider the things they are doing outside of their homes and take all steps to avoid any unnecessary risks.

“Reduce trips to the store, limit contact with people outside of your household, and be vigilant about wearing a mask and keeping distance from others. These sacrifices are critical to getting back to a more manageable case rate for our

communities and protecting our most vulnerable residents,” said Russ Duke, District Director for Central District Health.

More information:

South Central Public Health District

Counties: Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka, Twin Falls

COVID-19 hotlines: Spanish (208) 737-5965, English (208) 737-1138.

Data, guidance, and resources: <https://phd5.idaho.gov/coronavirus>

Central District Health

Counties: Ada, Boise, Elmore, Valley

COVID-19 hotline: (208) 321-2222

Data, guidance, and resources: <https://www.cdh.idaho.gov/covid>

Southwest District Health

Counties: Adams, Washington, Payette, Gem, Canyon, Owyhee

COVID-19 hotline: (208) 455-5411

Data, guidance, and resources: <https://www.phd3.idaho.gov/covid19>

Panhandle Health District

Counties: Boundary, Bonner, Kootenai, Benewah, Shoshone

COVID-19 hotline: 877-415-5225

Data, guidance, and resources: www.panhandlehealthdistrict.org/COVID-19