

NEWS RELEASE--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

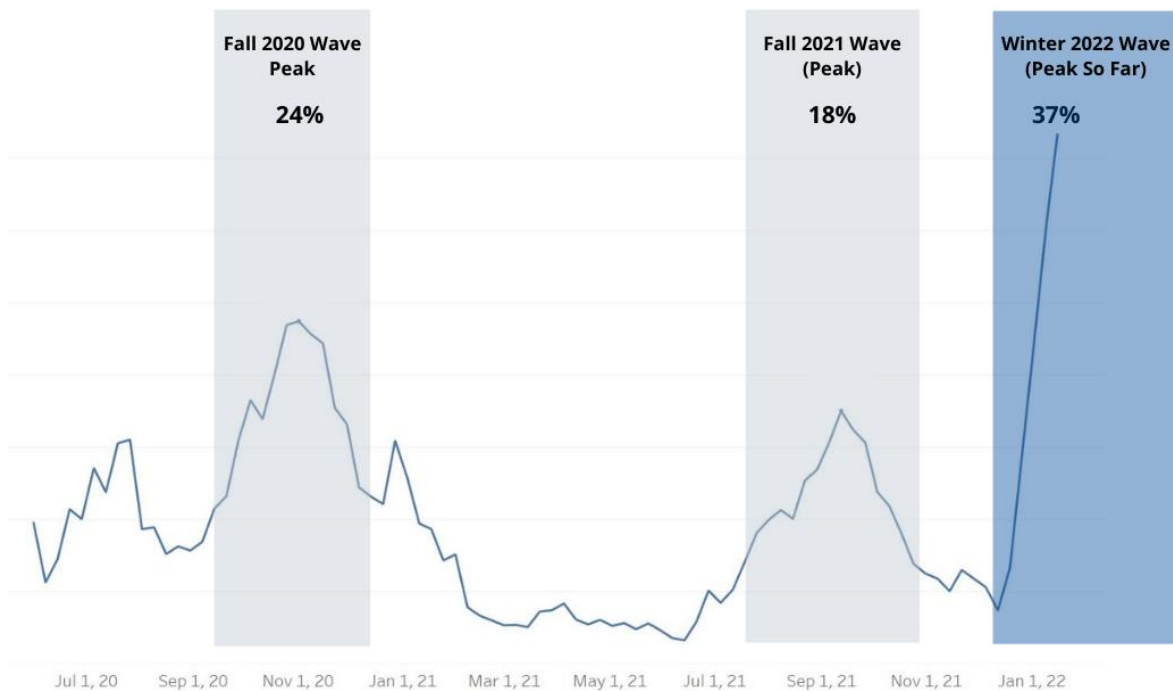
Date: February 1, 2022

COVID-19 testing positivity rate hits record levels in south central Idaho.

Case rates are climbing faster than ever seen before. Public Health ends universal case investigations, focuses remaining investigations on high-risk residents.

SOUTH CENTRAL IDAHO – COVID-19 is breaking records in the latest case surge hitting Idaho. South Central Public Health District (SCPHD) warns local cases are growing faster compared to other surges and the positivity rate in south central Idaho has hit record highs.

COVID-19 test positivity rate in south central Idaho



Positivity rates show the percentage of COVID-19 tests that come back positive. When the rate increases, it's a red flag warning that disease is spreading more quickly in the community. When the positivity rate rises above five percent, public health organizations around the world encourage communities take immediate action to protect against further disease spread.

The most recent positivity rate, published January 27th, 2022, shows south central Idaho has a 37 percent test positivity rate, almost double the peak rate in the last case surge and more than seven times the recommended safety threshold. A 37 percent positivity rate means that of every 100 tests, 37 return positive for COVID-19.

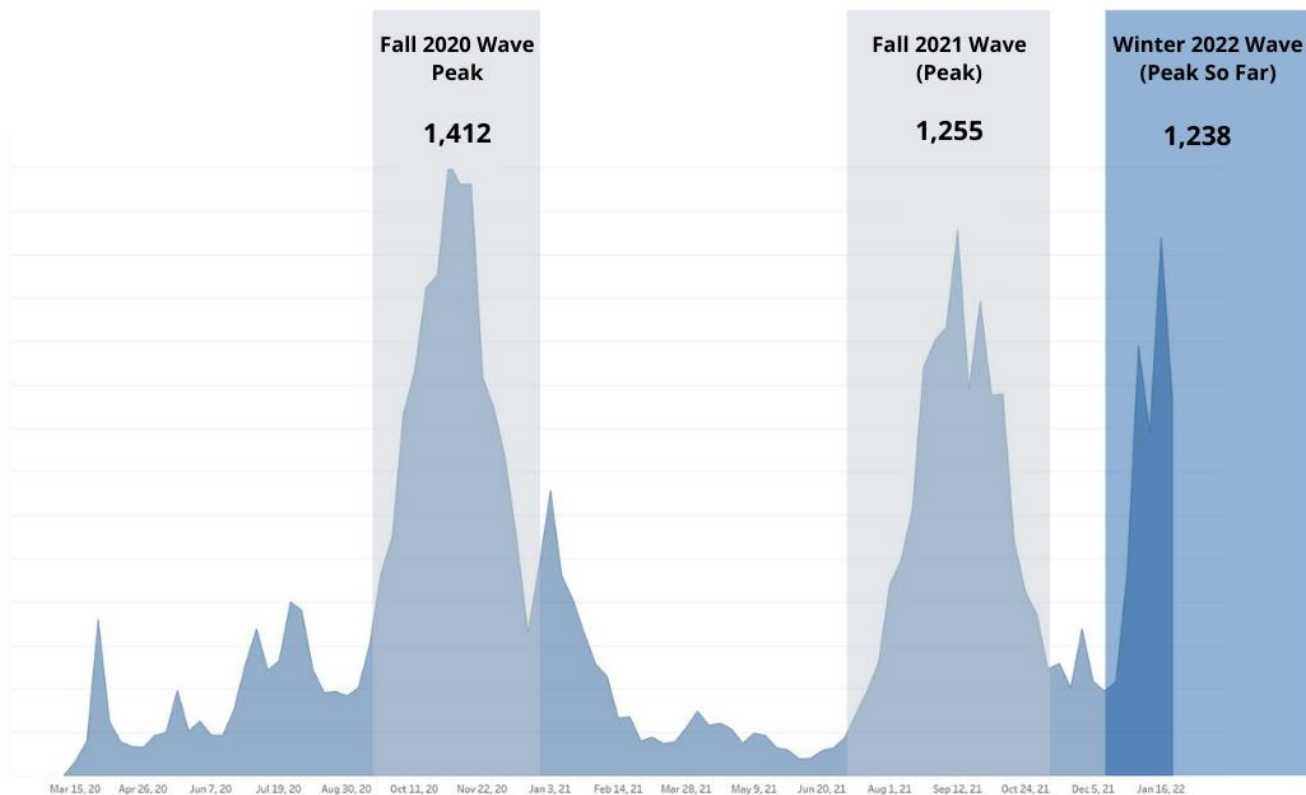
“More than a third of our neighbors and family members testing for COVID-19 are actually sick with the disease. That’s incredibly alarming,” said Logan Hudson, SCPHD Division Administrator. “This disease is spreading at a rate faster than we’ve ever seen before.”

More people are getting sick in less time

The presence of Omicron in the region, a highly infectious COVID-19 variant, has pushed the current case surge to grow faster than previous surges. In the 2021 fall wave, it took 11 weeks for reports to climb to more than 1,000 cases in a calendar week. In this 2022 winter wave, it took half the time, requiring only five weeks to make same climb.

Continuing to compare weekly case rates, the first wave peaked at about 14 hundred cases reported in a week, the second wave peaked at about 12 hundred. After just a month of surging case counts in this wave, the region has already reported more than 12 hundred cases in a week’s time. Meanwhile, cases in nearly every county in the region are trending upward.

Cases reported by week



As cases surge, disease investigations are strained. Idaho Health and Welfare (DHW) is reporting a backlog of more than 42 thousand positive lab results from around the state. Several thousand of these lab results are in south central Idaho.

Not all positive lab results are reported as cases. According to DHW, an estimated 20-30 percent of labs in the state are repeat labs (when someone takes more than one test in a short time period), results from a non-resident, or a positive result from someone who already tested positive less than 90 days ago. This means that approximately only 70-80 percent of the positive lab reports in Idaho are reported as cases.

Ending universal case investigation

Once positive cases are sorted from the other lab results, it takes an average of 10 minutes per case to enter information into databases used for public reporting and an additional 30-45 minutes to conduct a full investigation on a case. Investigations are not required to report a case, but are helpful in confirming ethnicity, employment, and other demographic details that help track disease spread and community resource needs.

Currently, SCPHD is receiving an average 150 cases reported a day. To keep up with the new cases and start chipping away at the lab results backlog, the health district would have to hire at least 17 full time employees to focus on investigations alone. The health district doesn't have the infrastructure to provide for such a large increase in staffing in such a short time period.

With DHW's recommendation, SCPHD has scaled back investigations to focus on high-risk residents. Specifically, this includes people living in congregated living facilities (i.e. dorms, long-term care facilities, jails, etc.), residents who have been hospitalized, healthcare and other frontline workers, etc. SCPHD will no longer reach out to every person who tests positive for COVID-19.

"This change in procedure means we are no longer going to be the first ones reaching out to many of our residents who test positive. We won't be able to collect quite as much data, and we will rely more heavily on the accuracy of the lab reports sent to us," said Hudson.

SCPHD is asking residents who test positive for COVID-19 to assist this new process by self-reporting symptoms and other illness data on a secure online [form](#). This data will stay confidential and will be used to help epidemiologists track the disease.

Protect your health

SCPHD urges all residents to choose actions that protect their health and mitigate the risk of infection in every setting. This includes getting vaccinations up-to-date, social distancing wherever possible, wearing a mask in areas where social distancing is not possible, protecting personal health with exercise, sleep, and healthy eating, and limiting gatherings with people they don't live with.

"We all play an important role in slowing the spread of disease and protecting our community. That role becomes more critical when we are facing a case surge like this one," said Hudson. "Please continue to do all you can to protect your health and the health of the people around you."

If residents have any questions about COVID-19, including quarantine guidelines, what to do if you test positive, when to test after exposure, masking guidance, etc., please reach out to the COVID-19 hotline at 208-737-1138 or check the SCPHD website at phd5.idaho.gov/coronavirus.