

Idaho – we can do this, but we need your help

Idahoans, we need your help. On behalf of nearly 30 health care groups representing thousands of providers at every level across the state, we want to express our alarm at what we are witnessing now, and let you know what you can do to help.

First, health care providers are a diverse group of people. Some of us are Republicans, some are Democrats, and some are Independents. The fact is, we don't see COVID-19 as a political issue, but rather a health crisis affecting us, our families, and our communities. We want to go back to normal more than anyone. We are tired and we miss our families. We hate seeing the often-preventable suffering of so many ill people. The thousands of deaths and long-term illnesses of our neighbors has taken an immense mental toll on our workforce.

The facts are alarming. The Delta variant is dangerously contagious. It is more contagious than the common cold, seasonal flu, or Ebola. On average, people infected with the Delta variant will spread the infection to 5 to 8 other people. This is almost as contagious as chicken pox. Infected people go to their homes, to work, or to school, and may spread the infection before they even realize they are positive. Sometimes an infected person has no symptoms, yet still spreads the disease. The latest data shows that the test positivity rate in Idaho was 13.2% and climbing. As of Aug. 31, approximately 543 patients in Idaho were hospitalized with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 and 167 of those patients were in the ICU with confirmed COVID-19. Perhaps most discouraging is the fact that approximately 97 COVID-19 patients in Idaho were on a ventilator, the highest recorded number at any time during this pandemic.

What is most alarming? That the worst is yet to come. Children are headed back to school, which is where we want them, but the natural proximity of kids in classrooms during a highly contagious outbreak of COVID-19 is distressing to parents and the health workforce alike. Emerging data shows us that children of all ages can transmit the virus to others in their households. Keep in mind that children under the age of 12 can not yet get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Sadly, scientific modeling confirms very worrisome scenarios in Idaho's near future. Since July, the COVID-19 cases spiked from 3.4 to 37.7 per 100,000 population. Models indicate that by mid-October, Idaho could see 30,000 cases per week which is thousands more than any week in 2020. Discussions surrounding the activation of crisis standards of care are underway, which means **hospitals may be forced to ration care**. Or more simply put, your hospital may not be able to care for everyone in the community, whether you get COVID-19, get in a mountain biking accident, or have a heart attack. Even today as hospitals fill up, tired and overworked health care workers are struggling to give you the best care they can if you have COVID-19 or any other illness right now.

We know from other states with similarly low vaccination rates that the surge is coming. Health care facilities in Idaho are receiving calls from places like Missouri and Arkansas asking if they can transport patients to our hospitals. Which begs the question, when our surge gets worse, where will we send Idahoans?

The picture we paint is horrible, but it is just a snapshot of what we see every day at work. **But there is good news.** We can do something to turn the tide, save lives, and ensure our kids can go back to school and stay in school safely.

What can you do? First, get the vaccine. More than 200 million Americans have safely and effectively been vaccinated for COVID-19. In fact, just last week, the Pfizer vaccine received full approval from the FDA after rigorous evaluations showed it met the very high standards we have in this country.

We also know from this very large sample size that the vaccine is working. Since Jan. 1, 96.1 percent of new COVID-19 cases are people who were not vaccinated. We also know that 95.8 percent of hospitalized patients are unvaccinated and 96.8 percent of those who have died from COVID-19 were unvaccinated. By receiving the vaccine, you are protecting yourself and those who are not eligible to be vaccinated yet – children under the age of 12.

While we know the vaccine saves lives by helping to prevent severe disease and hospitalizations, we also know that vaccine breakthrough infections do occur with the Delta variant. Thus, even vaccinated individuals, who may have only mild symptoms due to protection from the vaccine, can still transmit the virus to others. That is why we also ask you to continue to practice basic public health measures like consistently wearing a mask in indoor settings and crowded outdoor settings and distancing yourselves from others whenever possible. These are extremely small yet effective measures you can take to save lives and help us all get back to normal.

We don't want to see you in the ICU. We want to see you live your life. On behalf of the health workforce in Idaho, we are asking for your help.

SIGNATORIES (Listed Alphabetically)

American Nurses Association of Idaho

Boise Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Family Medicine Residency of Idaho

Idaho Academy of Family Physicians Board of Directors

Idaho Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Idaho Chapter of the American College of Surgeons

Idaho Acupuncture Association

Idaho Ambulatory Surgery Center Association

Idaho Center for Nursing

Idaho College of Emergency Physicians

Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine

Idaho Health Care Association

Idaho Hospital Association

Idaho Medical Association

Idaho Medical Group Management Association

Idaho Primary Care Association

Idaho Society of Anesthesiologists

Idaho Society of Ophthalmologists

Idaho Society of Health-System Pharmacists

Idaho State Dental Association

Independent Doctors of Idaho

Intermountain Cassia Regional Hospital

Nurse Leaders of Idaho

Nurse Practitioners of Idaho

Saint Alphonsus Health System

Saltzer Health, an Intermountain Healthcare Company

Shoshone Family Medical Center

St. Luke's Health

Staff and providers of Primary Health Medical Group