



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Katherine Hoyer, PHD
208-415-5108

Kim Anderson, Kootenai Health
208.625.5300

Erin Binnall, Bonner General Health
208.265.3390

Local Health Leaders Provide COVID-19 Guidance

NORTH IDAHO PANHANDLE – Panhandle Health District (PHD), Bonner General Health (BGH), and Kootenai Health are working to offer guidance in these confusing COVID-19 times. Our area continues to see a rise in cases as businesses are opening and many of us are relaxing into summer. However, this is not the time to let our guard down.

COVID-19 cases are spiking throughout our area and we are seeing community transmission in Kootenai, Bonner, and Benewah counties. The virus has not let up and we can't either. Contact tracing has shown that many of the new cases are a result of social settings where no or very few precautions are being taken. The good news is we know what slows the spread; masking, physical distancing and handwashing work. Recent studies of masking efforts in New York, Wuhan and Italy show that wearing masks in public is the best way to lower community transmission rates when everyone participates.

“The guidance continues to remain the same in combatting this virus,” said Lora Whalen, PHD Director. “Everyone who can, should be wearing a cloth face covering when out in public. Keeping a 6-foot distance between yourself and others is also very important. Lastly, hand washing and sanitizing high touch surfaces is recommended.”

“Earlier this year we saw how social distancing and masking in public helped slow the virus spread so our local health care system was not overwhelmed in the first wave of COVID-19,” said Karen Cabell, D.O., Chief Physician Executive at Kootenai Health. “We are seeing a sharp increase in cases with lifted restrictions, more in the first three weeks

of June than we had in March through May combined. We all want to keep our businesses open, safely go back to work, and have adequate hospital capacity for a surge of COVID – 19 patients needing care. We are asking everyone in our community to not let their guard down and to continue to practice the proven measures to fight COVID-19. Wear a mask in public, follow social distancing guidelines, stay home if you are sick, and wash your hands frequently.”

As more people are exposed to someone with COVID-19, more people are seeking testing. A common misconception is that if you had close contact to a person with COVID-19, then you should immediately be tested. Unfortunately, it’s a lot more complicated than that. If you have had close contact with a positive case, you should begin to self-isolate from the general public and especially high-risk individuals. Stay home other than to seek medical treatment. If you do leave your home, wear a mask to prevent potential spread.

“It is important not to test too soon,” said Erin Binnall, Community Development Manager/Public Information Officer for Bonner General Health. “The incubation period for COVID-19 after exposure is approximately three to five days, and possibly up to 14 days. If you test too soon after exposure, you may test negative, giving you a false sense of relief. Your doctor can help you know the right time to be tested.”

Contact tracing is being conducted for each positive case through PHD. Through the process of contact tracing, PHD notifies individuals who may have been exposed to the virus. This process is completely voluntary and confidential. We all need to work together with health districts to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Contact tracing and self-isolating for people with COVID-19 and their close contacts are critical to help slow transmission of COVID-19 in our communities.

COVID-19 testing is available in our area and we encourage anyone who needs to be tested to call their primary care provider or PHD’s hotline.

According to the CDC, people with COVID-19 have had a wide range of symptoms reported – ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness.

Symptoms may appear **two to 14 days after exposure to the virus**. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose

- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

“We have learned a lot about COVID-19, how it spreads, and the measures needed to keep people safe,” said Dr. Cabell. “At Kootenai Health we are taking every precaution so we can protect patients and staff from the spread of COVID-19 and also continue to provide needed care for our community.”

For more information regarding COVID-19, visit panhandlehealthdistrict.org/covid-19 or call the Panhandle Health District Hotline Monday – Friday from 8:00 am – 5:00 pm at 877-415-5225.

Panhandle Health District provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.

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