



Panhandle Health District

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Panhandle Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kootenai & Boundary Counties Move to Substantial (Red) Risk Category

NORTH IDAHO – COVID-19 case rates continue to rise in the Panhandle Health District (PHD) area. This combined with increasing test positivity rates and current hospital capacity is concerning. Based on PHD’s regional gating criteria, they are moving Kootenai and Boundary counties into the Substantial (Red) COVID-19 risk category. Shoshone county will move to the Moderate (Orange) risk category, and Bonner and Benewah remain in the Minimal (Yellow) risk category.

“We know these categories are important to the schools in making their decisions moving forward,” said Lora Whalen, District Director for Panhandle Health District. “Schools and districts in our area have excellent plans in place to keep kids safe in school.”

“Yesterday, the State Board of Education modified their reopening guidance for schools, doing away with their recommendation to move to full remote learning under the red category,” said Whalen. “This will enable schools to look at their individual schools and consider implementing plans to keep kids in some form of modified face-to-face learning with safety measures in place.”

County risk categories are reviewed and updated each Thursday. The key metrics PHD uses to determine the county risk levels include positivity rate, hospitalizations, and a 7-day rolling average of cases per county.

“These decisions are not made lightly, we don’t make knee-jerk reactions,” said Whalen. “We are seeing trends that are moving in the opposite direction from where we want to be. Rates of community transmission and testing positivity are increasing, and regional hospital capacity is tight.”

No matter what the risk level, whether green or red, the following precautions should continue to be taken by everyone in our community:

- Wear a cloth face covering when in public.
- Consider not attending large gatherings.
- Wash your hands frequently.
- Maintain at least 6 feet between yourself and those outside of your household.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Clean and disinfect your home and workspace.
- Monitor your health.
- If you have been identified as a close contact of a positive case, follow CDC isolation and testing guidance.

“We will continue to support our schools in their decision making and provide them up-to-date data and the latest CDC guidance to help inform their decisions in educating our youth as safely as possible,” said Whalen. “As a community, we can keep our students in school, and keep our businesses open, but precautions have to be taken seriously by everyone.”

A full list of recommendations for the general public, for all risk levels can be found in PHD’s regional gating criteria plan at www.panhandlehealthdistrict.org/COVID-19.

If you have questions about COVID-19 in our area, call PHD’s COVID-19 hotline Monday – Friday, 8am-5pm, 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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