



Panhandle Health District

Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Panhandle Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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March 11, 2021

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All Five PHD Counties Move to Yellow Risk Category

North Idaho –In accordance with the regional COVID-19 gating criteria, all five counties that the Panhandle Health District (PHD) serves have moved to the yellow risk category. Kootenai, Bonner, Boundary, Benewah, and Shoshone counties all moved into the yellow category on Thursday, March 11.

“We are cautiously optimistic seeing these trends,” said Jeff Lee, PHD epidemiologist. “Although these trends are promising, this is not the time to let our guard down. These trends are in part due to the precautions we have been taking and should continue to take until we reach a level of herd immunity that will provide greater protection.”

Viruses mutate constantly, but some mutations give viruses an advantage. There are 5 different coronavirus variants that are currently circulating in the U.S. and they share similar mutations in the spike protein. Multiple studies show that these new variants may be more contagious or can infect people who have previously recovered from the earlier version of the coronavirus. As long as the coronavirus continues to spread through our communities, mutations will continue to happen. Masking, physical distancing, hand washing, avoiding large crowds and getting vaccinated when your turn is up will limit the spread and give the virus less chances to change.

COVID-19 variants have now been identified in multiple areas of Idaho and around the nation. The UK variant is known to spread more easily and quickly than other variants. This variant was first detected in the US at the end of December 2020. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports 1,881 cases of the UK variant among 45 states to-date. Laboratory testing identified the South African variant (B.1.351) of SARS-CoV-2, in a southwestern Idaho resident. It was the first official discovery of a variant of concern in Idaho. A second case with the South African variant has been identified in the state, and an investigation is ongoing. With variants of public health concern

emerging in Idaho, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) will begin reporting variant counts on its data dashboard.

IDHW and PHD encourage Idahoans to choose to receive the COVID-19 vaccine because there is evidence the authorized COVID-19 vaccines will provide protections from virus variants. This is being closely investigated and more studies are under way.

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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