



Press Release – For Immediate Release

## COVID-19 Update Friday, November 20, 2020 6:00 pm

- Teton County holiday safety message
- Alarming case numbers for Idaho and surrounding region
- Sheriff Department expresses support for local mask orders
- Eastern Idaho Public Health (EIPH):  
Regional Hospitals and EMS report tenuous situation  
Vaccine approval and distribution timeline for Idaho
- Teton School District 401 update

### Holiday Safety: spend a happy Thanksgiving at home with your immediate family

Unfortunately, this year's holiday season is accompanied by grim numbers for the ongoing pandemic--more than 1 million cases were documented in the past week in the US. **The CDC has recommended postponing travel for the holidays this year and limiting gatherings to one household**; they say “staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others”. For a comprehensive list of recommendations please refer to the Centers for Disease Control ([CDC website](https://www.cdc.gov)). See also the summary graphic at the end of this press release.

If you are attending or hosting a gathering locally, please follow the CDC recommendations for the sake of your family and friends’ health, and the community at large. We need to reduce community transmission of COVID-19 now!

**Keep in mind that Idaho’s COVID Recovery Stage 2 requirements are in effect, which include a ban on gatherings larger than 10 people. Locally, EIPH, Teton County, and the cities of Driggs and Victor all still have mask orders in place.** If you must gather with people outside your household, wear a mask, maintain 6-ft distancing where possible, and consider limiting your contact with non-immediate family members to outdoor gatherings, such as gathering around an outdoor fire.

**The risks of a post-Thanksgiving spike in cases is not an abstract possibility.** Canada celebrated its Thanksgiving on October 12; a surge of cases followed over the next two weeks (see graph).



If Teton County case counts continue to climb this fall and winter, severe mandates may be enacted, including business restrictions, a ban on all gatherings outside your immediate household or even a stay-at-home order. Schools may not be

able to re-open for in-person classes. Your personal behavior can help us avoid further strain on health care resources, schools, and loss of life and livelihood—or it can prolong the pain and suffering. Be responsible.

**Teton County & Regional case numbers and positive test rates:**

Teton County, Idaho’s COVID numbers improved somewhat this week over earlier in the month, but surrounding areas continue to report disturbing statistics. The holiday season approaches and local ski areas are opening, which could lead to an unprecedented surge in COVID spread.

Teton County, Idaho’s active case rate was reported at (a still very high) 33.8/10,000 population today, November 20, down from a high of 52.7 on November 11. If that metric does not increase over the next week, Teton could be moved down to the high-risk category under EIPH’s Regional Response Plan.

Teton County is still rated at critical risk because the case rate must stay below the 45/10k threshold for 14 consecutive days before EIPH will drop the risk rating. If the risk level drops, local schools may transition from remote learning to an alternate-day in-person schedule. But even a one-day increase over the 45/10k threshold will push back any risk downgrade by another 14 days.

**Bonneville County moved to the critical risk category** this week, joining Teton, Lemhi and Madison counties. EIPH reported 116 new cases for

Bonneville County today, bumping their active case rate to 49.7/10k. Madison added 58 cases, bringing their active case rate to an alarming 72.9/10. Bonneville and Jefferson counties lead the region in deaths, with 55 and 10, respectively. Seventeen deaths have been reported in the EIPH region since Monday.

Statewide, the picture is not encouraging. The President’s Coronavirus Task Force’s most recent report **ranks Idaho 12th out of 50 states in new cases**, and the task force states that 86% of Idaho counties have high levels of community transmission, including 6 of the 8 counties in the Eastern Idaho Public Health District. Yesterday, November 19, the state reported 1,543 new and probable cases. To date, Idaho has recorded 835 COVID-19-related deaths.

The Task Force’s report also shows that Idaho is in the red zone for test positivity, indicating a rate at or above 10.1%. According to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare ([coronavirus.idaho.gov](https://coronavirus.idaho.gov)), for the week of November 8, **Idaho’s positive test rate is at 17.8%, with an even higher rate of 21.6% in EIPH’s eight-county region.**

Last week, Teton Valley Hospital reported that **Teton County Idaho’s positive test rate was 16%**, down from a stratospheric 25% the week before (this metric will be updated next Monday).

To the east, in **Teton County, Wyoming**, the numbers are just as sobering. They are reporting 208 active cases as of yesterday, which would equate to an **active case rate of about 88/10k population**. Their positive test rate stands at 12.1%.

EIPH’s COVID-19 RISK LEVELS			
MINIMAL RISK Active Case Rate <15/10,000 population	MODERATE RISK Active Case Rate 15/10,000 population	HIGH RISK Active Case Rate 30/10,000 population	CRITICAL RISK Active Case Rate 45/10,000 population
Clark County	Custer County	Fremont County Jefferson County	Bonneville Lemhi County Madison County Teton County
GUIDANCE <a href="#">English</a>   <a href="#">Español</a>		<a href="#">Click here for guidance</a>	

As outlined in [EIPH’s COVID-19 Regional Response Plan](#), movement to a higher risk level will generally occur when a county has been above the metric’s threshold for 3 consecutive days (with the exception from Minimal to Moderate will which take formal action by the EIPH Board of Health). Movement to a lower risk level will occur when the county has been below the threshold for 14 consecutive days.

EIPH COVID-19 Cases					
County	Today’s Cases	Total Cases	Active Cases**	Active Rate Per 10K	Deaths
Bonneville*	116	6760	592	49.7	55
Clark*	1	48	1	11.8	0
Custer*	1	130	13	30.1	1
Fremont*	5	651	28	21.4	8
Jefferson*	20	1395	109	36.5	10
Lemhi*	4	415	25	31.1	7
Madison*	58	3739	291	72.9	7
Teton*	9	484	41	33.8	2
Total	214	13622	1100	48.4	90
Data Updated	11/20/2020 5:02:27 PM				

Some have questioned Teton School District 401's decision to move to all-remote learning as Teton County, Idaho hit the critical-risk level and these high positivity numbers. Keep in mind that the World Health Organization recommends general reopening when positivity is 5% or less for more than 14 consecutive days. New York City schools closed this week because the test positivity rate hit 3%.

**Teton County Sheriff Department commits to supporting local mask orders:**

In discussions with Teton County officials, representatives of the Teton County Sheriff Department expressed their support for local mask ordinances, saying they will encourage compliance.

Deputy Bridger Smith said that business owners and employees can and should call the Sheriff to report patrons in their place of business who refuse to abide by mask requirements and also refuse to leave their place of business. (Please use the non-emergency line, 208-354-2323 to keep the 911 line open for true emergencies.) Smith said deputies are not inclined to write tickets for \$100 fines (which is the penalty for County and city mask ordinances), but will instead attempt to defuse the situation and educate the public on the importance of the mask rules.

Teton County wishes to thank local law enforcement officers for their support in this matter.

**Board of Health reports on Hospital & EMS status, vaccine distribution timeline:**

In their bi-weekly report to the EIPH Board of Health on Thursday, regional hospital administrators from Idaho Falls and Rexburg, Idaho indicated that they are currently managing overall patient load, but due to many other state and regional facilities reaching capacity, their ability to adapt to any new case increases is eroding. Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center (EIRMC) COO David Hoffenberg said that hospitals in Utah and Boise are increasingly going on diversion, meaning they are not taking new ICU patients. "That means we have to stand on our own," he said. Hoffenberg assured the board that EIRMC currently has the beds and staffing resources to care for their 43 in-patient COVID cases, but said "we are nervous about our ability to do that in the long term."

Madison Memorial's CEO Dr. Rachel Gonzales also indicated her staff was "managing," but stressed that the situation could change quickly. "This is what diseases will do: wax and wane," she said. Gonzales said hearing that surrounding hospitals are at capacity "gives her pause."

Casey Jackman, COO of Idaho Falls Community Hospital, said his facility currently has 23 COVID patients, including patients received from Bonneville, Fremont, Madison and Jefferson Counties. The ongoing influx of COVID local and regional patients, who require copious attention and staffing resources, has placed a long-term strain on his staff. They are "fatigued and frustrated" with people failing to follow local mask orders and other precautions.

Idaho Falls Fire Chief Duane Nelson made an impassioned plea for more community action to curb the current COVID outbreak. He said his EMS personnel were coping with the current case and transport demands but warned that they cannot maintain existing service levels "if we don't do something dramatic." Nelson said his department can typically adapt to about a 5% increase in calls over the course of a year, but that EMS calls alone are 13-14% above the volume seen at the beginning of 2020. COVID-related calls are up 33% from the beginning of the pandemic. Some of his staff are working "mentally and physically daunting" 72 to 96-hour weeks, which is unsustainable.

The department is now turning down transports from surrounding communities and transports to other area hospitals are being turned back. He emphasized that the situation affects all kinds of patients, including trauma victims. "This is not just a COVID issue," said Nelson. "We are on the precipice of not being able to care for all of the other things that come to our regional hospitals."

"Something else has to be done," Nelson concluded. "It's not going to go well if we continue on this trend."

**Amy Gamett, Director of Clinical Services for EIPH, updated the board on current vaccine development and likely scenarios for deployment.** As has been widely reported, she highlighted the two vaccines developed by Pfizer and Moderna that are most likely to reach the public first, pending Federal approval by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), and the CDC, which will probably occur by December. The

reported efficacy of these two vaccines is 90% and 94.5%, respectively. An additional 200 vaccines are under development.

Gamett said that during the first phase of deployment in December and January of 2021 there will be a very limited number of vaccine doses covering only a portion of Idaho's health care workers and most vulnerable populations. Phase 2, stretching from January to July, would see a steadily increasing number of doses distributed to additional health care and EMS workers and priority populations. Phase 3, from July to October, would see broader distribution across the entire population, and Phase 4, from next fall on, would likely see a diminishing demand for vaccines as most of the population will have been vaccinated at that point.

The takeaway: COVID will be with us for months to come, until vaccines are widely distributed enough to suppress community spread.

**Teton School District 401 Update:**

All TSD 401 students are now in the remote-learning model, which will continue through the Thanksgiving break (next Monday and Tuesday). The district admin team is meeting on Saturday, 11/28 and will re-evaluate the learning model for after Thanksgiving based on the EIPH risk level at that point.

This week, we logged four positive cases of coronavirus, one each at Teton High and Driggs Elementary, and two "other" non-building specific personnel (these two cases happened previously but hadn't yet been recorded in TSD numbers), and two possible exposures, one at Victor Elementary and another in the "other" category. All of these incidents involved staff members (no students).

Patrons and parents are encouraged to sign up for the weekly COVID Updates that the district has been providing to educators, the school board, and a few dozen community contacts. The updates come out each Monday. Here's the link to sign up: <https://tsd401.org/covid-portal/> (it's below the COVID Dashboard, which is also updated weekly.)

Because we are in Stage 2 of Idaho Rebounds, the number of fans who can attend Teton High athletic events is limited to 10 spectators only. This is one family member per athlete per game; no one will be allowed to watch the preceding or following game. Until hardware is installed so that THS is part of the NFHS Network, which broadcasts high school sports to subscribers, basketball games will be livestreamed on the Teton School District Facebook page.

We remind all families to be safe this holiday -- see graphic below. While we understand the desire to celebrate together, please understand the risks and choose the safest method possible. If your goal is, like ours, to have students safely back in school, your actions can help determine when that happens.



# Tips for Celebrating Safely This Thanksgiving

## SAFE

### CELEBRATE AT HOME



Prepare traditional dishes with those in your household

Host a virtual dinner and share recipes with family and friends



Put up your favorite decorations and share photos online

Watch parades, sporting events, and movies at home



Shop online instead of in stores

## LESS SAFE

### IF YOU GATHER, DO SO WISELY

Keep it small and stay local



Stay outside if possible and ensure proper ventilation if indoors

Wear masks and social distance



Wash or sanitize your hands regularly, especially before eating

Avoid contact with non-attendees for 14 days before and after your gathering



## UNSAFE

### AVOID...



Large gatherings, especially indoors

Potlucks, buffets, or other shared food



Places with crowds, such as stores, parades, running events, and sports

Contact with anyone who is sick or may have been exposed to COVID-19



These tips were developed from guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). You should also follow advice from your local health department.

If you are sick or have been in contact with someone who is sick or has COVID-19 symptoms, you should stay at home and away from others.

Public Health  
Communications  
COLLABORATIVE

Learn more at  
[publichealthcollaborative.org](https://publichealthcollaborative.org)

**Sign up for Community update emails**

To subscribe to Community COVID-19 update emails, [click here](#).

You can also get current COVID information, including links to a variety of pandemic-related resources, by going to **Teton County's COVID-19 Information Hub** at: <https://coronavirus-response-tetonidaho.hub.arcgis.com/>.