



Teton Valley Health  
Where Everyone Matters

Press Release – For Immediate Release

COVID-19 Update Thursday, October 1, 2020 revised 6:30 pm

- Eastern Idaho Public Health again moves Teton County from minimal to moderate risk level for COVID-19; regional hospitals report “tenuous” staffing situation with increase in cases; first death reported for Teton County
- Teton School District reports 17 positive COVID cases, 119 exposures at six of seven local public schools since semester began
- Simplified Teton Valley Health Testing Protocol
- Teton County receives first half of CARES Act COVID-19 rapid-test order
- Sign up for Community updates

**Eastern Idaho Public Health (EIPH):**

EIPH’s Board of Health (BOH) voted this morning to move Teton, Custer and Lemhi counties from the **minimal to moderate risk level**, as described in their [Regional Response Plan](#). As result, an EIPH health order mandating face coverings and restrictions on events and social gatherings has been reinstated.

Teton County officials have criticized the on-again, off-again nature of this health order as Teton’s case rate has fluctuated above and below the minimal-to-moderate case rate, saying the whipsaw changes send a confusing message to the public. Today, members of the BOH acknowledged that this “yo-yo-ing” is problematic, and will be considering plan changes in the upcoming week.

The plan originally established a metric of 10 active cases per 10,000 population to move from minimal to moderate risk level (which is 12 total active cases for Teton County), and 20 cases/10k to move to the high risk level. The board later raised the threshold significantly for high risk from 20 to 50 cases /10k, citing additional factors, including adequate hospital capacity, that they felt warranted the modified metric.

COVID-19 RISK LEVELS			
MINIMAL RISK	MODERATE RISK	HIGH RISK	CRITICAL RISK
Clark County	Bonneville County Custer County Fremont County Jefferson County Lemhi County Madison County Teton County		
GUIDANCE <a href="#">English</a>   <a href="#">Español</a>	GUIDANCE <a href="#">English</a>   <a href="#">Español</a>	GUIDANCE <a href="#">English</a>   <a href="#">Español</a>	

EIPH COVID-19 Cases					
County	Today's Cases	Total Cases	Active Cases**	Active Rate Per 10K	Deaths
Bonneville*	55	2933	213	17.9	17
Clark*	0	35	2	23.7	0
Custer*	0	67	7	16.2	1
Fremont*	2	224	30	22.9	3
Jefferson*	13	641	76	25.4	3
Lemhi*	1	111	17	21.2	0
Madison*	31	924	202	50.6	2
Teton*	1	194	28	23.1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>5129</b>	<b>575</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>27</b>
Data Updated	10/1/2020 5:07:44 PM				

Teton has exceeded the 10 / 10k active rate since September 22, and has exceeded 20 cases/10k for six days now. As of this evening, Teton’s active case rate stood at 23.1. (At press time, EIPH also reported the first death in Teton County.

**No details have yet been confirmed.)** The BOH did not raise the risk level for Madison County today, despite the fact that the county has exceeded the plan's 50/10k high-risk threshold for a week.

BOH Chair Byron Reed, a Bonneville County commissioner, said this morning that he is reluctant to enact more restrictive health mandates, citing public comments he's received encouraging the board to lift all restrictions. Some comments noted that while active case numbers have increased with the beginning of the school year as expected, hospitalization numbers have not increased significantly. BOH member Brent Mendenhall, a Madison County commissioner, also made that point, wondering whether active case rate really made sense as the board's primary risk-level metric.

However, Dr. Barbara Nelson, the lone physician on the EIPH board, cautioned that hospitalizations are a lagging indicator, and that backing off of health precautions would be inadvisable. Her concerns were borne out by reports from the region's hospital administrators.

Casey Jackman, C.O.O. of Idaho Falls Community Hospital, reported six COVID patients currently in his ICU (four of which were on ventilators) and that as of last night their ICU "is on divert," meaning they are referring incoming critical care patients to other hospitals. He said the medical-surgical floor would only accommodate a few more patients before reaching capacity. Jackman pointed out that while overall his facility was at 55% capacity in terms of available space, the hospital's limitations "are really staffing," as severely afflicted COVID patients require more nursing resources than the typical patient. The hospital has received overflow COVID patients from Pocatello and Bingham County during the last couple of weeks and reports of increasing caseloads as far away as Ogden, Utah. "It is on the rise for hospitalizations up and down the I-15 corridor," he said.

David Hoffenberg, C.O.O. of East Idaho Regional Medical Center (EIRMC), echoed Jackman's point, saying "staffing is a critical issue." He said EIRMC is not currently at divert status, but that they are examining every admission (COVID or not) to evaluate whether they have adequate or appropriate resources for that patient's needs. "The situation, though manageable today, could change very quickly," he said. As of today, EIRMC had six COVID patients in the ICU and ten on the med-surg floor, and has had multiple COVID deaths since the last BOH meeting on September 10. Hoffenberg says more newly hired staff are coming online in the coming weeks, but that EIRMC has struggled to recruit experienced nurses recently, as hospitals in hard-hit places like Texas and Florida have drawn many nurses to those areas by offering higher wages.

Madison Memorial Hospital's C.E.O Rachel Gonzalez said her facility was basically "the same status" as the others. "We're not really sure what the coming weeks and months will bring," she said. "It's tenuous right now in Madison County."

EIPH District Director Geri Rackow, addressing the BOH, confirmed that the district's own data showing adequate physical space in local hospitals do not take into account staffing issues or shortages. She encouraged further discussions between the board and local hospitals on this issue.

Ms. Rackow also reported that COVID lab test turnaround time is currently at around two days, but that it is increasing with rising case numbers. She also pointed out that the EIPH region's positivity rate has consistently been the highest in Idaho this month. State positive test rates rose from a several month low of 6.7% in early September to about 8% today, while EIPH counties have seen a collective rise in the positive test rate from about 12% to 16% during the same period.

### **Teton School District (TSD) 401**

This week brought reports of additional positive COVID cases at Driggs Elementary School: two students and two staff members. Possible exposures were reported for 15 students and a staff member. The school district elected to close Driggs Elementary Wednesday and Thursday, reopening next week, due to staffing shortages resulting from COVID infections. Friday, October 2, is a Professional Development Day when no classes are scheduled district-wide.

A positive case was also reported at Teton Middle School, as well as possible exposures to 5 students and 4 staff members. Possible exposures of students and staff were also reported at Teton High School, and Victor Elementary, Tetonia Elementary, and Rendezvous Upper Elementary schools.

**This brings the total of school-related positive cases this semester to 17, and the number of possible exposures within the district to 119.**

The school district continues to implore parents and students to abide by COVID-19 precautions: monitor your child for any signs of illness, stay home if you are sick, wear a mask at school and in public, practice social-distancing when possible, and wash your hands more frequently and use hand sanitizer.

*If you or anyone in your family has COVID symptoms, call Teton Valley Health at 208-354-2383 to schedule a COVID test or to make an appointment with a health care provider.*

### **Teton Valley Health (TVH):**

Responding to public confusion regarding COVID-19 testing policy in Teton County, TVH has issued a one-page, five-point summary of its testing protocols (see below). C.E.O. Keith Gnagey wishes to reassure local residents that they can get a test if they want one. Some people may be administered rapid tests while others will have their samples sent to a lab for processing. The time differential for receiving results is currently only a day or two.



## **COVID Testing Protocol**

1. Anyone may be tested. A parent or guardian must authorize a child's test.
2. All tests results are provided to the patient or guardian in 1 to 3 days.
3. We reserve our quickest resulting tests for those that are sickest.
4. Contact our COVID nurse (**208-354-2383**) Monday through Friday from 8 AM - 5 PM, to be scheduled. Patients must be scheduled in order to be tested. The COVID nurse will ask for basic information, symptoms, and verbal consent for the test; then the COVID nurse will provide a date, time, and instructions for the testing procedure.
5. We test at 9 AM, 11 AM, 1 PM, and 3 PM on weekdays at the Hospital in Driggs using our ambulance bay for a drive thru. Tests can be performed at other times if there is an emergent need.

### **Teton County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)**

County Emergency manager Greg Adams announced today that Teton County received the first half of an order of 2,000 COVID-19 rapid tests, paid for by CARES Act funds awarded to the county earlier in the year. Teton Valley Health will administer these tests. TVH also has an order pending for more rapid tests.

**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/>.