

Please use the links below to find answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about COVID-19 and its prevalence in our communities. If you cannot find an answer to your question, feel free to reach out by email to [scphd@phd5.idaho.gov](mailto:scphd@phd5.idaho.gov) or call the hotline at 208-737-1138 (English) and 208-737-5965 (Spanish).

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## What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 (**coronavirus disease of 2019**) is a respiratory disease discovered in 2019, caused by a novel coronavirus: SARS-CoV-2. Most people will recover on their own, but some people may develop viral pneumonia and require medical care or hospitalization.

- COVID-19 is thought to be spread mostly through droplets via sneezing and coughing from an infected person. It can also be spread through contact with infected surfaces like doorknobs or handles or from virus particles lingering in the air. COVID-19 can be spread before someone knows they are sick. [Learn more here.](#)
- For the latest local numbers check: <https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/Coronavirus/>  
For the latest state numbers check: <https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/>  
For the latest national numbers check: [https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases\\_casesinlast7days](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesinlast7days)
- The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and shortness of breath occurring on average 2-14 days after exposure. [More symptoms here.](#) Healthcare providers should always be consulted for questions about symptoms or testing.
- Emergency warning signs to seek medical attention include:
  - Trouble breathing
  - Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
  - New confusion or inability to arouse
  - Bluish lips or face
- If COVID-19 continues to spread in Idaho, your life may be disrupted in a variety of ways. Keep yourself and your household healthy by being prepared. Some ways you can do that:
  - Talk to your employer about what will happen if another employee falls ill. Can you work from home? Work out a protocol with your employer just in case your child becomes sick or is on quarantine and cannot attend daycare or school.
  - Your children's school schedules may change as infection rates in your community change. Make sure you have childcare lined up just in case your child's school or daycare is closed to prevent spread of the virus.
- The risk COVID-19 is not connected with race, ethnicity or nationality. Stigma will not help to fight the illness. Seeking and sharing accurate information during a time of heightened concern is one of the best things we can do to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

## How can I prevent the spread of COVID-19?

- Prevention starts with practicing good [personal health habits](#):
  - Wear a Mask
  - Wash Your Hands
  - Watch your distance (stay 6ft apart)
- Medical grade surgical masks and N95 respirators are not recommended for wear by the general public, but fabric masks are encouraged. Learn more [here](#).
- Like other diseases, getting plenty of rest, drinking fluids, eating healthy foods, and managing your stress may help you prevent getting COVID-19 and recovering from it if you do.
- People are thought to be most contagious when they are the sickest, however we have confirmed cases of people who are considered infectious but aren't showing any symptoms. It is important to always wear a mask to protect people from your germs just in case you have the virus but don't have any symptoms (known as being asymptomatic).

### **Create a household Plan of Action**

- Make an emergency plan of action with your household members, relatives, and friends. Visit Emergency Preparedness and You [here](#) for more information.
- School closures and event cancelation may continue to slow the spread of the disease. Guidance is updated frequently. Seek reliable sources for updates like Idaho Health and Welfare, SCPHD, and the CDC.
- **Make plans for alternative arrangements for your child or yourself in the case of a school or university dismissal or shutdown. Make plans for your elders and your pets, as needed.**
- **Check in with your work about your sick leave and telework options should you need to stay home to care for a household member.**
- Make a list of your emergency contacts—family, friends, neighbors, carpool drivers, health care providers, teachers, employers, local public health department, and community resources.
- Gather extra supplies, such as soap, tissues, and hand sanitizer. If you or one of your household members have a chronic condition and regularly take prescription drugs, talk to your health provider, pharmacist, and insurance provider about keeping an emergency supply of medications at home.

### **What do I do if COVID-19 starts spreading in my community?**

- Stay informed about local COVID-19 activity through our [website](#) and be aware of any signs that people in your community are getting sick. For example, watch for school dismissals or closures.

- Avoid contact with people who are sick and keep six feet between yourself and people outside your household. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and wash your hands often with soap or water. Don't share personal items and clean frequently touched surfaces with soap and water. Avoid gatherings where you cannot social distance and consider limiting public activities and travel unless necessary.
- If you are sick, stay home to avoid spreading the virus to others. If you need to seek medical care call your provider and ask for instructions so that you don't put anyone else at risk of contracting the virus. If you live with others, if possible, limit exposure by staying in one room and using separate bathrooms.
- Set up a separate room (including a bathroom, if possible) for sick household members. Do not interact with them more than necessary.
- **Do not attend large events, such as sporting events, conferences, or other community events if you are sick, do not feel well, or someone in your home is sick. If you aren't sick, consider your risk of getting COVID-19 at the event and make sure to wear a mask and social distance at all times.**
- Watch yourself and family for symptoms of COVID-19. Tell your employer if you feel sick and stay home. Notify your children's child care facility if they are sick.
- Check in with family and friends who live alone—especially those with chronic diseases. If you live alone, ask your friends and family to check in with you if you become sick.

## MISC FAQs:

### **How many people have the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

Check the state website for Idaho numbers: <https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/>

For Public Health District 5 numbers check: <https://phd5.idaho.gov/coronavirus>

Current COVID-19 cases in the U.S. are related to both travel and person-to-person spread. U.S. case counts are updated daily at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>.

### **Should I be tested?**

**Call** your healthcare provider (doctor) if you are showing symptoms of COVID-19 especially if you have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or if you live in or have recently traveled from an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19. Call 2-11 if you need help finding a doctor. Visit <https://get-tested-covid19.org/> to find a testing center near you.

STAY HOME if you do not feel well and limit your exposure to others.

### **What about the serology test or antibody test?**

These are research-based tests that are helpful for understanding COVID-19 and treatment plans, but as of yet an antibody test DOES NOT indicate that you are immune to the virus. Learn more about the different kind of tests available here: <https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/Documents/COVID-schools/COVID-19%20Testing.pdf>

**The CDC recently admitted that only a small percentage of deaths were from COVID-19 alone. Is this proof that COVID-19 is not as deadly as the media wants us to believe? Is this proof death rates are inflated?**

It's true the CDC released a statement explaining that only 6 percent of COVID-19 related fatalities were from COVID-19 alone. However, this does not mean the other 94 percent were totally unrelated. It only means that these people who died from COVID-19 were fighting something that wasn't strictly a COVID-19 infection. Underlying conditions that make a person more at risk can include common issues like diabetes, obesity, or asthma or conditions that are more likely to be severe like cancer. An underlying condition may also include an infection they received while fighting COVID-19, like pneumonia.

Because the underlying condition alone would not have killed them at that point in time if they hadn't contracted COVID-19, the disease is included on their death certificate as a contributing cause of death. These cases are correctly included in statistics as a COVID-19-related death.

This is not new information. The CDC has been sending out these reports for months. In March, public health began warning that people with underlying medical conditions are at greater risk for COVID-19 complications and death. This 6% situation is not new or surprising—it's exactly what we expected, except maybe with a slightly higher death rate than we expected for people with no other health conditions.

## How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is thought to be spread mostly through respiratory droplets via sneezing and coughing from an infected person. It can also be spread through contact with infected surfaces like doorknobs or handles or from virus particles lingering in the air. COVID-19 can be spread before someone knows they are sick. [Learn more here.](#)

### **What is community spread?**

Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area and don't know how they were infected. This means people are not coming into contact with obvious cases of COVID-19, but are still contracting the disease.

### **How many people have COVID-19 in my area?**

For the latest local numbers check: <https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/Coronavirus/>

For the latest state numbers check: <https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/>

For the latest national numbers check: [https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases\\_casesinlast7days](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesinlast7days)

### **Can someone who has had Covid-19 spread the illness to others?**

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading from person-to-person. Someone who is infected with COVID-19 can spread the illness to others. That is why CDC recommends that these patients stay isolated until they are better and no longer pose a risk of infecting others.

How long someone is actively infected can vary so the decision on when to release someone from isolation is made on a case-by-case basis depending on their illness factors. Learn more [here](#).

### **Can someone who has been quarantined spread the virus to someone else?**

Quarantine means separating a person or group of people who have been exposed to a contagious disease but have not developed illness (symptoms) from others who have not been exposed. Quarantine is usually established for the incubation period of the communicable disease, which is the span of time during which people have developed illness after exposure. For COVID-19, the period of quarantine is 14 days from the last date of exposure, which means that it can take up to 14 days for the disease to show itself with symptoms or in a positive test. You cannot test out of quarantine early because in some cases it takes the full 2-week period for disease to show up on tests. Learn more [here](#) and [here](#).

### **Should I avoid certain types of people to avoid getting sick?**

As new information emerges from across the globe, please remember that the risk of COVID-19 is not at all connected with race, ethnicity or nationality. Stigma will not help to fight the illness. Seeking and sharing accurate information during a time of heightened concern is one of the best things we can do to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

## Who has COVID-19 near me?

### **Who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 in my community?**

Because information is protected by a medical law, called HIPAA, we cannot give out information that may identify an individual. However, we do offer information on a county, regional, and state basis to help you monitor the risk level in your community. People travel between counties frequently in south central Idaho, so the risk in surrounding areas will also impact your community.

### **How many people have COVID-19 in my area?**

- For the latest risk assessment check: [https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/CoronaVirus/#Risk\\_Levels](https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/CoronaVirus/#Risk_Levels)
- For the latest local numbers check: <https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/Coronavirus/>
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Other organizations tracking cases will be use the websites above to report their numbers and may have delayed information.

### **Where did our area's first cases get the disease?**

Investigation showed our state's earliest cases were travel related. Minimizing contact between yourself and people you don't live with (six feet or more at all times) is the one of the best ways to prevent the spread of this virus.

### **Should I be concerned about pets or other animals and COVID-19?**

You should restrict contact with pets and other animals while you are sick with COVID-19, just like you would around other people. There have been a few reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19 so it is recommended that people sick with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus. Wash your hands before and after you interact with pets.

### **How will I know if I have been exposed to COVID-19?**

The Health District investigation team works seven days a week to identify anyone who may have been exposed to the disease by these individuals and to monitor their health. If you have been exposed by one of these cases our team will contact you. However, case surges occasionally overwhelm public health efforts and delay contact for some individuals. During these times, you may not be contacted. It is a good idea to reach out to all of your close contacts and ensure they are ready to warn you if they contract COVID-19 or even begin to show symptoms.

If you begin to show symptoms please call your healthcare provider and ask for an evaluation. To find testing locations use this map: <https://get-tested-covid19.org/>

## How can I protect against the disease and what is the risk in my community?

COVID-19 is typically spread between people in close proximity to each other. It may also be spread through germs lingering in the air after someone breathes, and germs left on a commonly touched surface. There are a few simple steps you can work into your daily routine to help protect your health and the health of those around you:

- Keep six feet between yourself and anyone outside your household
- Wear a mask in public areas, especially if social distancing isn't possible
- Wash your hands well, for at least 20 seconds, with soap and warm water
- Avoid as many high-travel areas as possible
- Disinfect all surfaces regularly
- Do what you can to stay healthy including: getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising

### **Check the regional risk summary for your county.**

Every week SCPHD meets to review data for each county in south central Idaho. This data includes hospital capacity, average cases reported each day, test positivity rates, and other epidemiological factors. Every two weeks, SCPHD publishes a report assessing the risk level for each county and reporting the metrics used to determine that risk level. You can find a summary of those risk levels [here](#). Click on that summary and you'll find more information for each county.

These risk summaries include mitigation strategies SCPHD urges everyone to take to help slow the spread of this disease and protect our communities.

### **Should I be afraid?**

No. This virus acts much like other viruses we have encountered in the past. You should absolutely respect the danger it presents to members of our community with weakened or challenged immune systems and do everything you can to slow the spread of COVID-19 for your health and the health of those around you.

### **Will masks/facial covering protect me from the Coronavirus? Why are masks/facial coverings recommended now?**

The CDC [recommends wearing a cloth face](#) covering as an **\*additional\*** protective measure while in public in areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain and **especially** in areas of significant community spread. **Masks should be used in addition to social distancing and handwashing.** Research suggests that a face cloth can slow the spread from people who are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic (people who don't know they are infected yet).

### **Any type of face covering should not be using by:**

- Children under 2
- Anyone with trouble breathing without the use of the mask
- Anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask on their own

### **Cloth face coverings should:**

- **Be Washed regularly,** every day or after every use
- **Be put on and taken off with clean hands (wash hands after removing)**
- **Not be touched while on your face except by the ear loops**



- Fit snugly on the face
- Include multiple layers of fabric (cotton is suggested as a possible option)
- Allow for easy breathing
- **Masks do not replace social distancing, they only provide extra protection**

[Learn more here.](#)

### **What should I do to be prepared if I do get coronavirus?**

[Make plans now.](#) Talk to your employer about the company policy if someone gets sick. Check with friends and family to set up childcare if necessary. Separate a room in your home to act as the “sick” room so that if you contract COVID-19 you don’t spread it to your family.

### **If I self-isolate do I have to cut off contact with everyone? / I am feeling depressed or anxious because I am stressed out by this situation. What do I do?**

Self-isolation means no physical contact with anyone to prevent the spread of the virus while waiting for test results. However, you should still reach out to family and friends for conversation and comfort via video calls, texting, phone calls, and other electronic means. If you are feeling depressed, anxious, or mental impacts from the stress please reach out and ask for help.

SAMHSA offers toll-free crisis counseling and support through the Disaster Distress Helpline by calling 1-800-985-5990 or texting “TalkWithUs” to 66746.

The Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline (ISPH) answers phone calls 24 hours per day, 7 days per week at 208-398- HELP (4357) or 1-800-273-TALK (8255). ISPH provides crisis text response at 208-398-HELP (4357) from 3pm to midnight, Monday-Friday

### **Is it safe to travel?**

Travel increases your chance of getting and spreading COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

[See the latest CDC guidance here.](#)

## Questions about testing:

### **Should I be tested for the Coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

If you are concerned you have contracted COVID-19, we encourage you to pay close attention to any symptoms that show the presence of the disease. If you are showing symptoms please self-isolate immediately and call your healthcare provider for an evaluation. SCPHD cannot make medical evaluations or provide testing You must contact your healthcare provider for those. They will contact us. If you are not showing symptoms but you are concerned you have COVID-19, third-party testing organizations like “Crush the Curve” are often willing to test. This may cost more and take longer to return your results.

Ask them about cost and return time and make sure to ask them for a PCR test, because they are considered the most accurate option.

Call your healthcare provider if you feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19, or if you live in or have recently traveled from an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.

**\*\*\*\*\* DO NOT GO INTO THE E.R. AND ASK FOR A TEST (UNLESS IT IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY). IT IS IMPORTANT YOU CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER FIRST SO THEY CAN HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS TO AVOID SPREADING THE VIRUS. THE E.R. SHOULD BE RESERVED FOR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES ONLY\*\*\*\*\***

Your healthcare provider will work with your state's public health department and CDC to determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19.

If a healthcare provider will not see you, call the nearest hospital, tell them you may have contracted COVID-19, and follow their instructions.

**At what point should I start seeking out a coronavirus screening/talk to my doctor?**

As soon as you start showing symptoms. Immediately isolate yourself and call your healthcare provider for guidance.

**My doctor said that they don't do the tests at their office, what do I do now?**

Call 211 and ask for assistance finding another provider, or check for a new testing location at <https://get-tested-covid19.org/>

**How do I get tested if I don't have a primary provider?**

Please call 211. They can help you find a healthcare provider.

**Where can I get tested?**

South Central Public Health District **does not hold any testing kits and doesn't not have the ability to perform tests.** If you think you may have COVID-19 please call your healthcare provider and request an evaluation. Make sure they give you instructions so that you don't accidentally spread the virus when you come in for that evaluation. If your provider's evaluation leads them to believe you need testing they will take a sample and send it to one of several labs currently authorized to perform testing. If you do not have a healthcare provider call 211 for assistance.

SCPHD also keeps a map of our area's largest testing providers on our website at [phd5.idaho.gov/coronavirus](http://phd5.idaho.gov/coronavirus)

**Can I get tested at a pharmacy?**

Some pharmacies are now providing test kits. Make sure to ask for a PCR kit because it is the most accurate. An antigen kit is not as accurate and will require a follow up PCR tests to verify results.

### **Why isn't everyone with symptoms being tested?**

Because this virus is so new and so many people are requesting testing at the same time, resources occasionally become limited and spread thin. Labs are sometimes overwhelmed with the number of tests requested and healthcare offices may run low on sampling supplies.

**Testing is not necessary to act.** If you are showing symptoms call your healthcare provider and ask for guidance. If they cannot test you, self-isolate in your home until your symptoms depart and then call your doctor again for updated guidance. Even if you are not battling COVID-19, you may be battling another virus that you still don't want to spread in your community.

### **I have all of the symptoms of Coronavirus, but my healthcare provider won't test me. Why wasn't I tested? What should I do now?**

Your healthcare provider has to follow testing guidelines set by the CDC on the national level. Symptoms of coronavirus are the same as symptoms of several other illnesses, including flu and cold. Please follow the guidance of your healthcare provider. If they do not feel you should be tested, continue to self-isolate until your symptoms depart, then call them again for further guidance.

You may also reach out to other healthcare providers and clinics for testing. SCPHD has a list of testing sites on the coronavirus page on our website with our area's largest testing providers. Whomever you choose, make sure to ask if they offer the PCR test. This is the test that has been approved by our federal partners and shown to be the most accurate.

### **I was tested for COVID-19 several days/weeks ago and still haven't received my results. What should I do now?**

Don't wait for a positive test to protect the people around you. Because of a limited supply of materials and increase in testing, many labs have longer turn arounds for results. If you are not considered "high risk" your test results may be further delayed as high-risk individuals take priority.

Stay isolated and continue to talk to your healthcare provider for guidance. If you have to leave the house make sure to wear a mask and stay six feet from everyone you don't live with to lessen the risk of disease spread. Make sure you've reached out to all close contacts to warn them that they may have been exposed to COVID-19 and your tests results are delayed.

### **I tested positive for COVID-19 several days/weeks ago and still haven't heard from public health. Why?**

When our region sees big surges in confirmed cases investigation can be delayed. Don't wait for your test results or a call from public health to protect the people around you.

Stay isolated and continue to talk to your healthcare provider for guidance. If you have to interact with people inside your home make sure to wear a mask and stay six feet away from everyone to lessen the risk of disease spread. Don't leave the house unless it is a medical emergency. Reach out to friends and family for help running errands. Make sure you've reached out to all close contacts to warn them that they may have been exposed to COVID-19.

## Questions about school and children:

**South Central Public Health District has a school resource page with more information and helpful infographics:** <https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/covid-school/>

### **Will SCPHD close my school?**

SCPHD does not have the authority to shut down schools. However, our disease response team is working with local school districts to bring them latest information about risk to their staff and students. We encourage all schools to follow the mitigation strategies in the risk assessment for their county, found [here](#).

Each school district has the liberty to use that information in their district COVID-19 plans. This means some school districts follow and work closely with the health district, and some choose not to. Depending on the risk in their community, some school districts may choose to close their doors and revert to online school. Please see their website or call your school district office for more information about their plan and what they are doing to protect your student's health.

SCPHD recommends following all CDC guidance to protect students and staff. SCPHD has also released a regional risk level plan that will help guide your school's personalized risk plan found [here](#).

### **What is the risk level for my community?**

Every week SCPHD meets to review data for each county in south central Idaho. This data includes hospital capacity, average cases reported each day, test positivity rates, and other epidemiological factors. Every two weeks, SCPHD publishes a report assessing the risk level for each county and reporting the metrics used to determine that risk level. You can find a summary of those risk levels [here](#). This contains more information for each county.

These risk summaries include mitigation strategies SCPHD urges everyone to take to help slow the spread of this disease and protect our communities.

### **Where should I take my kids if their school won't let them attend?**

If your student has been named a close-contact and has been asked to quarantine, please keep them at home and away from other people for 14 days. That includes keeping them 6 feet, or more, from all family and friends who do not live with you. Do NOT take them to a daycare, work, or on errands with you until their quarantine period is over.

If you need a letter confirming your child is on quarantine so you can stay home from work, please contact the agency that confirmed their status. If they were identified by a school district employee, please contact the school district. If they were identified by the health district, please contact us at 208-737-5940.

### **How do I know my child's school plan?/I have a question about my child's school plan.**

Please contact your school or school district for more information about their school plans. SCPHD does not speak for them and cannot answer those questions. Many school districts have posted their plans on their websites.

### **My child's school told parents they have a case within in the district. Can you confirm?**

No, we cannot confirm this. We will track these cases, but as a HIPAA licensed facility we cannot provide information about individual cases. In addition, we cannot provide any information that will identify someone who's information has been entrusted to us without their consent. This is federal law. Please call the school district for more information about the case in question.

### **My child's school told parents they have a case within in the district. What are they doing to protect students/why aren't they doing (so-and-so) to protect students?**

Please ask your school district. We do not speak for them and cannot answer these questions. We did offer guidance while districts established their plans. All of the guidance we offer can be found [here](#). and on the CDC's website under Schools and COVID-19.

The health district asked all schools to mandate mask use within school buildings, but it was up to them to decide whether or not they would follow that guidance.

### **My child's school told parents they have a case within in the district. Do I need to pull my child out of school to get tested?**

COVID-19 can develop up to 14 days after exposure. That means testing your child immediately (if they are not showing symptoms) may give you a false negative simply because the virus is still spreading in your child's system. If your child is considered a close contact (that means they spent 15 minutes or more within 6 feet of the person who tested positive) they will be asked to stay home for a full 14 days after their exposure. It is important they DO NOT leave the house during this time, or come into close contact with

anyone who does not live in your home. Please continue to socialize using technology or by keeping all visitors at least six feet from your child until the quarantine period is over and they have not shown any symptoms. Learn more about smart quarantine [here](#).

Schools are responsible for contact tracing within individual classes. If you believe your child may be a close-contact because of interactions within a classroom, and you have not been contacted by the health district, please reach out to your school to confirm whether or not your child was a close-contact.

If your child is showing symptoms and has been exposed to someone with COVID-19 we recommend you reach out to your healthcare provider right away for an evaluation and to ask about testing.

### **My child should/shouldn't be considered a close contact.**

Schools are responsible for contact tracing within their classrooms. If you believe your child may be a close-contact and you have not been contacted by the health district please reach out to your school to confirm whether or not your child was a close-contact. If you believe your child should not be considered a close contact, please reach out to your school district to confirm with them.

### **How do I see what risk category my child's school is in?**

SCPHD has released a regional risk level plan that will help guide your school's personalized risk plan. Counties are rated one of four colors based on risk. Those color assignments will be updated every other Thursday on [https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/CoronaVirus/#Risk\\_Levels](https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/CoronaVirus/#Risk_Levels). The first update was August 13, 2020. You can check your school district website to see how the Health District risk level aligns with your school district's risk level and plan.

### **I run a child care, what should do?**

At this time, our best guidance is to follow the Idaho Child Care Provider's Manual. Find the latest CDC guidance here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>

### **I am a WIC client and I can't find any formula. What do I do?**

Please reach out to our WIC staff members in the office nearest you: <https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/WIC/>

## Questions about business or event closures:

### **Will SCPHD close down events to prevent COVID-19 from entering our community?**

South Central Public Health District is actively considering all local events and the potential threat COVID-19 presents for each community. Please consider the risk level for your community and the recommendations in the risk assessment before planning or holding an event: [https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/CoronaVirus/#Risk\\_Levels](https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/CoronaVirus/#Risk_Levels) (Click on the summary for a full assessment of each county).

To be clear, SCPHD does not have authority to shut down events, but we can issue recommendations to the event organizers and host cities. SCPHD supports any decision made by a venue or event manager to postpone or cancel mass gatherings and public events.

The regional Board of Health **does** have the authority to make mandates, closures, etc. to protect the health of our community, but has chosen not to take any of those actions at this time. Learn more about the Board of Health [here](#).

### **Will the health district mandate any closures?**

SCPHD does not have authority to make mandates or require closures, but we can issue recommendations to business owners and local elected leaders.

The regional Board of Health **does** have the authority to make mandates, closures, etc. to protect the health of our community, but has chosen not to take any of those actions at this time. Learn more about the health board [here](#).

### **I run a restaurant/grocery store/convenience store/other food establishment, what I should do?**

At this time, there is no evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted through food or drink, however it can be spread person to person. SCPHD encourages businesses to follow the CDC's guidance in operating restaurants and bars: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/business-employers/bars-restaurants.html>

## Isolation or Quarantine?

### **What is the difference between isolating and quarantining?**

People are asked to quarantine when they have been exposed to COVID-19 but aren't showing symptoms. This means they should stay home for 14 full days starting the day after they were last exposed and limit their contact to people who live in their household. If you are not showing symptoms, the CDC has updated their guidance to allow for shortened quarantine time. Learn more about smart quarantine [here](#). Learn more about the latest CDC guidance on quarantine [here](#).

People are asked to isolate when they have tested positive for COVID-19. If you test positive, it is crucial you warn everyone you came in to close contact with starting 2 days before you began showing symptoms or tested positive for the disease. Do not leave your house. Do what you can to avoid close contact with all people—including people you share a home with. If you are not showing symptoms, you may leave isolation 10 days after your test date. If you are showing symptoms, you may leave isolation 10 days after your symptoms onset date AND you haven't had a fever in 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medicine AND your symptoms have been consistently improving.

Learn more about the difference between 10 days in isolation or 14 days in quarantine [here](#). Learn more about the difference between isolation and quarantine [here](#).

## COVID-19 vaccines:

### How can I get a vaccine for COVID-19?

Currently there is no vaccine available for COVID-19. Several vaccines are currently in trials to ensure they are safe and effective before they are released for public use. Learn more [here](#).

### Are COVID-19 vaccines more dangerous because they are being rushed through the process?

No. COVID-19 vaccines undergo the same safety procedures and testing any other vaccine receives. The FDA is prioritizing these vaccines so they can don't have to wait in line for approval like other vaccines. This speeds up their approval process, but it does not mean they will skip any safety steps. Learn more [here](#).

## Regional Risk Level Plan/Blaine County Plan:

### How do I see what risk category my community is in?

SCPHD has released a regional risk level plan to help residents and community leaders make decisions that will protect the health everyone around them. Counties are color coded based on risk. Those color assignments will be updated every other Thursday and are found on [https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/CoronaVirus/#Risk\\_Levels](https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/CoronaVirus/#Risk_Levels). The first update was August 13, 2020.

The risk plan has more details about how and where the metrics are used. Read through it [here](#).

### What is the weight of each metric in the final assessment?

Metrics for determining risk level are weighted in the following order:

4. The **Hospital Capacity** metric has **the most weight** in the final assessment. If a hospital is reaching capacity they will not be able to respond to any medical emergencies, including non-COVID-19 needs like heart attacks and baby deliveries.
5. The **Daily Case Rates** metric has the **next most weight** alongside the **Other Epidemiological Factors** metric. If our case rate is high it indicates the virus is still spreading quickly around our community. A higher case rate also impacts the health district's ability to investigate and contact trace.
6. The **Positivity Rate** metric has the **least amount of weight**. If healthcare providers are limiting testing to people showing symptoms, it may give a skewed image of the situation. However, it can still be helpful in determining if case rate



increases are the result of further spread within a community or simply because of increased testing rates.

SCPHD included some limited flexibility in the plan because each of our counties are incredibly different. We continue to monitor the situation in all communities and stay in contact with local elected leaders so we can have as much feedback as possible while creating these assessments.

### **How is the daily average calculated?**

Our daily average is based on a fourteen-day rolling average. This means each day of the two-week period we consider is actually an average of the 14 days before it. This helps to prevent one very good or very bad day from skewing data and presenting a false picture of the risk in our counties. The intention with this metric is to see the trend instead of determining an assessment based on a single day's data.

### **What data is used to determine the daily average?**

SCPHD uses a rolling day average (see above) from the two full weeks before the assessment. These weeks run from Sunday to Saturday. For example, in the September 10<sup>th</sup> assessment SCPHD used the 14-day rolling average from August 23<sup>rd</sup> to September 5<sup>th</sup>. This gives our epidemiologists time to investigate cases, identify trends, and get a better understanding of the cases represented in those numbers.

### **What are the mitigation strategies?**

All mitigation strategies are suggestions from the health district for everyone. We encourage businesses, individuals, government offices, schools, etc. to follow the strategies for our current risk tier. However, these are not mandated by the district. The Board of Health has offered these strategies and will make decisions as a group to determine whether or not any mandates are necessary for the health of our community.

You can find the mitigation strategies for each risk tier directly after the risk level in the regional risk assessment document found here (click the summary):

<https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/Documents/Coronavirus/Regional-Risk-Level-Plan.pdf>

### **When will updates come in or movement between risk levels happen?**

Data to support the corresponding Health Risk Level and any related mitigation strategies will be posted with each assessment every other Thursday. Movement from one risk level to a lesser risk level will occur at 14-day intervals (one incubation period for COVID-19), while advancement to a level of higher risk may happen sooner, if necessary.

Determinations to move to a more restrictive risk level may be made mid-stage if any of the criteria below are met:

- Crisis standards of care are implemented
- Senior leadership at a local hospital indicates that further increases in cases in the community will overwhelm local hospital capacity.

- Reported cases exceed **> 5 daily new cases** per 10,000 people in a defined population (e.g., town, city, or county) or if new case rate adversely impacts SCPHD's ability to respond.

If restrictions are necessary and board members choose to pass a mandate it will only happen after a board meeting and vote is held.

### **More important information about the risk assessment:**

The risk levels may be applied at a town, city, county, geographic, or regional level.

Different parts of SCPHD's region may be at different risk levels. Risk levels can increase or decrease.

In ALL risk levels, the everyday preventive measures outlined in the Minimal Risk Level should be followed. Always prepare for the next risk level.

In addition to metrics determining exposure risk, public health officials will also be closely monitoring and may take into consideration for movement to a different risk level are the following:

- Input from hospital partners
- Trends in COVID-19 testing, including positivity rate and turn-around time of test results
- Supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for healthcare providers/first responders
- Epidemiological investigation capacity
- COVID-19-related hospitalizations and deaths
- Reports of emergency department visits with COVID-19-like symptoms

### **Why isn't Blaine County assessed under the same plan as the rest of the district?**

Blaine County is assessed under the district's Regional Risk Level plan but has also elected to adopt their own plan. The county plan uses stricter thresholds and is focused on preventing new cases instead of mitigating current cases. It follows the guidance of the Harvard Global Health Institute's Key Metrics for COVID-19 Suppression. SCPHD will provide data for Blaine County's plan and assist in the assessment.

Please refer to Blaine County's website for latest data, their assessment, and their plan.

If you have any questions about Blaine County's plan please call their question line: 208-788-5508

## Numbers, Investigation, and Complaints:

**The CDC recently explained that most COVID-19 related deaths were not from COVID-19 alone. Isn't this proof that COVID-19 is not as deadly as the media wants us to believe? Isn't this proof death rates are inflated?**

It's true that the CDC released a statement explaining that only 6 percent of COVID-19 related fatalities were just from COVID-19. However, this does not mean the other 94 percent were totally unrelated. It only means that the people who died from COVID-19 had something else going on along with a COVID-19 infection. They had another underlying condition that made their bodies less able to handle the COVID-19 infection like diabetes, heart disease, or asthma. Or COVID-19 caused another condition or kept them from fighting off another infection they'd normally be able to, like pneumonia or another respiratory illness.

But COVID-19 is included on their death certificate as a contributing cause of death, and they are correctly included in statistics as a COVID-19-related death, because the something else going on in their body wouldn't have killed them at that point in time if they hadn't had COVID-19.

This is not new information. The CDC has been sending out these reports for several weeks, and since March public health has warned that people with underlying medical conditions are at greater risk for COVID-19 complications and death. This 6% situation is not new, or news, or surprising—it's exactly what we expected, except maybe with a slightly higher death rate than we expected for people with no other health conditions.

**Why don't the state numbers match local numbers?**

Idaho Health and Welfare (IDHW, Idaho's state public health agency) receive their data from local investigations. This means that SCPHD has data before IDHW and fills out electronic forms to get that information to IDHW as soon as possible. This causes a natural delay. Additionally, IDHW pulls their daily data around 2 or 3 p.m. every day. SCPHD pulls the data for the daily updates at 5 p.m. This means that any new cases, or case transfers, after 3 p.m. will be included in SCPHD's data but not IDHW's.

**Why don't SCPHD numbers match other organizations numbers?**

SCPHD is the starting point for all data. Our health district reports the information we get in lab reports and investigations to IDHW who then reports to agencies like the CDC. There will be a natural delay in information between SCPHD and all other organizations because of the reporting structure. SCPHD will have the latest and most accurate information on their website after every update.

SCPHD also provides information based on two different data sets. The daily updates (on <https://www.phd5.idaho.gov/Coronavirus/>) report data collected between the end of two business days. It is pulled at 5 p.m. daily and is meant to give a basic update to our residents.

The data used for [weekly reports](#), risk [assessments](#), and in the [daily data reports](#) updated once a week are from cases reported in a full calendar day (or from midnight to midnight).

## **Why doesn't SCPHD report confirmed cases for tourists or visitors?**

SCPHD follows a protocol that was created and agreed upon by all 50 states. This agreement is to send positive results for any reportable disease (including COVID19) to the health department or district with jurisdiction where the individual \*lives\*. This means that SCPHD does not typically see any data for visitors to our region. This process is meant to prevent double-counting or losing cases, but it can seem incomplete for tourist areas that see high numbers of visitors.

Recently St. Luke's released data about all of the tests coming in through each of their hospitals. You can find it here: <https://www.stlukesonline.org/health-services/service-groups/covid-resources/covid-data-and-reporting>

## **How is SCPHD following up on positive cases?**

Investigators will contact the individual and gather information about the potential point of transmission (where they got it). They will also ask questions to learn who might have been in close contact with the individual. Those close contacts will be informed and will be monitored until 14 days have passed since the moment they were potentially exposed.

Case surges may delay investigations and contact tracing, so we urge everyone to review this [document](#) so they know what to do if they test positive.

## **DO NOT WAIT FOR A CALL FROM PUBLIC HEALTH OR A POSITIVE TEST RESULT TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS AND PROTECT THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU FROM DISEASE.**

Close contacts are people you were within 6-feet of for 15 minutes or more. SCPHD recommends contacting people individually rather than sending a widespread message, to avoid any unnecessary alarm of friends, family and co-workers.

## **How do I report an event or business that isn't following guidelines?**

SCPHD has a process to inform event organizers when a complaint is filed against them. We do not have the authority to enforce our guidelines and these businesses will not be fined. However, we are happy to reach out and remind them of important precautions and why taking those precautions can help protect people. Please email your concern to [scphd@phd5.idaho.gov](mailto:scphd@phd5.idaho.gov).

If a business is breaking safety standards for employees please refer them to the OSHA complaint line so they can investigate: 1-800-321-**OSHA** (6742)