COVID-19 vaccine distribution planning underway in Idaho

Thursday October 1, 2020

Boise, Idaho – Governor Brad Little and public health officials today outlined the steps Idaho is taking to work with the federal government on distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

“The availability of a safe, effective COVID-19 vaccine is one of the biggest hurdles in getting our lives closer to normal. We’re proud that the United States is taking a leadership role in the research and development of the vaccine. Here in Idaho, we have been planning for months for the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine and we will remain focused on making sure Idaho is ready when the initial supply becomes available,” Governor Little said.

The **federal government said its goal is to produce and deliver 300 million doses of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines to states starting in January** (https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/explaining-operation-warp-speed/index.html). Idaho’s plan for distribution of the vaccine is on track to be submitted to the federal government by Oct. 16.

Governor Little announced that he is directing the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare to convene the new Idaho COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee to advise the Governor on the prioritization of vaccines when it is in limited supply, on the implementation of the vaccination plan, and on communication and delivery of the vaccine. More information on the committee and its membership will be available in the coming days.

State public health officials stressed that the initial supply of vaccine is expected to be limited. Although the final decision has not been made yet, it is expected the vaccine likely will be offered first to healthcare workers. Vaccinating healthcare workers will protect them and their patients.

New COVID-19 testing resources coming to Idaho schools

Governor Little also highlighted today that Idaho will receive an additional 530,000 Abbott BinaxNOW rapid antigen tests, and he is prioritizing these tests be used for schools.

The tests are inexpensive, simple to use, more than 95-percent accurate, and produce results within 15 minutes with a less invasive nasal swab and no machine.

“The new rapid tests are a game changer for schools. The new tests quickly determine who has and does not have COVID-19 so students and teachers can be back in their classrooms,” Governor Little said.

The additional 530,000 tests will be delivered to Idaho over the next three months, with a shipment of 35,000 tests being shipped today to local public health agencies across the state to help support COVID-19 testing in schools. Many rapid tests that Idaho already received are being used in Idaho’s long-term care facilities.

Governor clarifies Stage 4 and emergency order

Governor Little also said Idaho will remain open and in Stage 4 of the **Idaho Rebounds plan** (https://rebound.idaho.gov/stages-of-reopening/) for another two weeks because statewide metrics were not met over the past two weeks for the number of reported cases, the percent of positive tests, and the number of COVID hospitalizations.

However, Governor Little emphasized that under Stage 4 Idaho is open for business and there are no restrictions on businesses and other activities. Stage 4 does include important recommendations for businesses and residents to follow in order to limit the spread of COVID-19.

“I often hear and read, ‘Open up Idaho!’ Idaho is open and has been for months. The good actions of Idahoans and our business community enabled us to move to the final stage of our Idaho Rebounds plan months ago, and that’s one of the primary reasons Idaho is leading the country in our economic prosperity,” Governor Little said.

Governor Little also clarified misconceptions about the statewide COVID-19 emergency order. He said the emergency order exists for two primary reasons. First, it gives Idaho access to state and federal resources in order to protect citizens and expedite recovery, just like an emergency order for a flood, fire, or other natural disaster. Secondly, it communicates to the public that we are, indeed, in a state of emergency. All 50 states have active COVID-19 emergency orders in place.

The COVID-19 emergency order follows state law and takes responsible, measured steps to protect our loved ones and neighbors. It does not take away or infringe on Idahoans’ constitutional rights, it does not shut down Idaho, and it does not give local governments the authority to create and enforce local mask orders.

Governor Little added that as dropping temperatures drive people indoors, virus activity will pick up in Idaho and across the country in the coming months, reinforcing the need for people to get a flu shot and for all of us to ramp up our personal actions to slow the spread of coronavirus, keep our students in school, our loved ones safe, and our economy open.

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