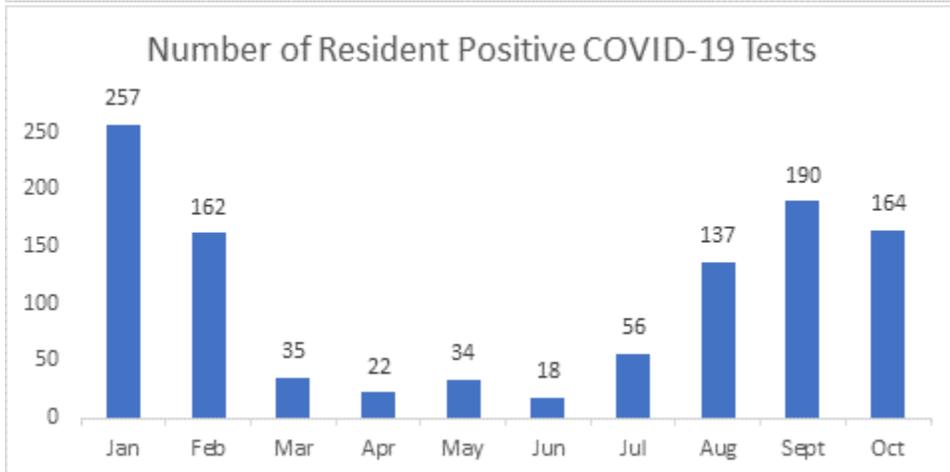
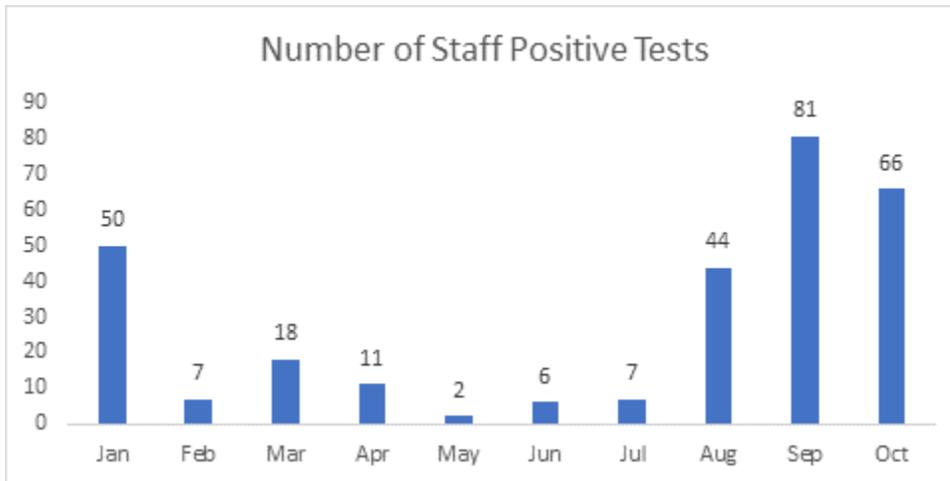


Hi All-

We're starting November off with some encouraging news: despite projections that our October COVID cases would surpass September's, that did not happen. That's the good news. The bad news is that as of the end of October, we had 66 staff and 164 residents test positive for COVID, numbers that are higher than anything we'd seen from March through August of this year.



Statewide cases – According to the DHW website, the 5 counties contributing the most new cases last week were: Ada, Kootenai, Canyon, Bonneville, and Bannock. The state hospitals continue to rely on crisis standards of care as the number of available ICU beds statewide hovers around 10. Idaho has now had a total of 291,316 COVID-19 cases and 3,538 COVID-related deaths.

Staff and resident testing – We continue to regularly conduct mass testing of residents and staff across the state. We've had several people ask why we are not testing vaccinated people in our mass testing efforts since breakthrough cases can happen. There are times that we do test all staff in a facility or a unit, but that determination depends on several factors – positivity rate among residents and staff, positivity rate in the community, vaccination rate among staff and residents, and availability of testing teams. Rates of breakthrough cases remain extremely low and the State epidemiologists continue to

advise us that vaccinated individuals, who are not showing any symptoms, only need to be tested when there is a known or possible exposure (strong likelihood you have been exposed to a COVID positive individual). That advice is consistent with CDC guidance. Additionally, please be aware that guidance regarding follow up testing has shifted from 3-5 days to 5-7 days after known or possible exposure. Please remember that vaccinated staff can “opt in” to mass testing anytime.

Vaccine boosters – Boosters are now readily available at your local pharmacy or doctor’s offices, should you want one. The CDC has approved the use of different boosters than your original vaccine, so, e.g., if you had Pfizer as your initial shots, you can have Moderna as your booster and vice versa. This is also true for those who had J&J. This makes it easy to just show up and get a booster on-demand. We are hearing from people who have gotten the booster that it’s causing more symptoms than the previous doses, so be prepared for a sore arm and maybe a headache, chills, aches, etc. People are reporting that those symptoms are going away within a day or two.

We are working to get a vaccine booster clinic scheduled for the south Boise area; Christine will send out information when we get closer. We are also actively working to plan for boosters for the resident population. Centurion should be starting those clinics for our most vulnerable populations within the next couple of weeks. The goal is to get boosters for residents completed in the month of November.

Vaccine Mandates – There’s been a lot of news lately about vaccine mandates. The state of Idaho recently joined a number of other states in filing legal challenges to vaccine mandates for federal contractors and an OSHA rule mandating vaccines for private employers with over 100 employees. There’s going to be a lot of movement on this issue in the coming weeks as these cases play out in the appropriate legal venues. In the meantime and unless directed otherwise, IDOC will continue to follow Governor Little’s executive order prohibiting state entities from mandating COVID vaccines. We will continue to strongly encourage – but not compel – people to avail themselves of the additional protection afforded by the vaccines.

As we head into the holiday season, please take good care of yourselves. COVID and the flu are expected to see bumps during the holidays because of all the close contact that occurs. Social distance + masks + good hygiene will help to keep you and yours healthy for the celebrations!

Thanks-
Josh