

COVID-19 Update - December 16, 2020

Hi All-

I have a brief update for you today and will be sending a longer one next week as we close out 2020. First, a bit of non-COVID news.

Townhall with Leadership: We've held two townhall events over the past 2 weeks and had more than 300 attendees. You can find these on eDOC if you weren't able to attend. They're not a perfect substitute for in-person groups, but I hope you found some value in them. Selfishly, I enjoyed them. We'll be scheduling monthly townhall meetings in 2021 to keep the conversation going, and you can submit questions anytime to BrightIdeas@idoc.idaho.gov with the subject line "Q's for leadership." Thanks to all of you who participated and/or submitted questions.

And now on to the COVID-19 updates.

Testing: We've recently had some staff come to the testing tent expecting the newly-approved saliva collection method. While the VA can now process the saliva samples, we're still working on acquiring the appropriate testing supplies. Until we're able to get the supplies on hand, we'll be using the nasal swabs. On Monday of this week, our testing teams moved from a chilly (read: darn cold) tent to a heated trailer at the Point of Entry in the S. Boise Complex. Huge kudos to Chuck Kincaid and his crew for making this happen so quickly!!!

COVID-19 Symptoms: Remember that the most common symptoms of COVID-19 include a fever, a new cough, and shortness of breath/difficulty breathing. If you are experiencing symptoms, please do NOT report to work but instead notify your supervisor and then make a plan to get tested. We know that some of the facilities are feeling a real staffing crunch, but having folks show up sick actually does more harm than good, as we then have to quarantine anyone who's been in close contact with you. Along those same lines, please get tested if you're experiencing symptoms. Staying out for a day or two then showing up to work again can compromise everyone's safety.

Vaccines: Vaccine questions came up on the townhalls, and the information has been changing by the day. As you know, Idaho's first vaccine doses arrived this early this week. The Idaho COVID-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee is finalizing recommendations for the Governor this week on plans to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine throughout the state. The State's first priority (1A) will be vaccinating healthcare workers and people living in long-term care facilities. While it could still change, our frontline staff are considered priority group 1B for vaccinations, and our residents are in phase 2 along with the populations at Health & Welfare's state hospital system and Juvenile Correction's residents. There's still a lot of uncertainty around the timing, but my best guess at this point is we could be issuing vaccines to staff by mid-January. For our resident population, we could be looking at the March/April timeframe. The timing will be dependent on the amount of vaccine delivered to the state and the number of people in earlier priority groups who choose to be vaccinated. We'll keep you posted as we learn more.

I've been asked a few times recently if vaccines will be mandatory for staff and residents, and at this point we will not mandate vaccinations. That said, we want to make sure the opportunity is extended to all of our staff and residents, and we hope everyone will take advantage of the opportunity to get vaccinated.

That's all for now. Please stay safe and take care of each other!

Thanks-
Josh