

DHW CONNECTION

A newsletter for the employees of the Idaho Department of Health & Welfare

NEW NURSING HOME OPENS THIS MONTH AT STATE HOSPITAL SOUTH



The dining area of Syringa Chalet on the campus at State Hospital South



Volume

29

Sep. 18, 2020

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Resident lounge area at Syringa Chalet on the campus at State Hospital South



DHWCONNECTION

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NEW NURSING HOME OPENS THIS MONTH AT STATE HOSPITAL SOUTH

Written by Jon Meyer, Division of Behavioral Health
Photographs by Julie Brodal, State Hospital South

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Residents will move into the newly completed Syringa Chalet nursing home in the next couple weeks on the Blackfoot campus of State Hospital South.

The new building will replace the former 82-year-old skilled nursing home, increasing the number of beds available to residents with mental illnesses who require skilled nursing level of care from 29 to 59, with an initial license for 42 resident beds.

“Our new facility reflects the goodness of Idahoans in caring for one of our most vulnerable populations—those who struggle with chronic mental illness. Syringa Chalet is a unique facility providing all the services of a skilled nursing facility but with a special focus on the treatment of mental illness,” Syringa Chalet Nursing Home Administrator Tamara Gillins said. “We accept admissions from all over the state. Those residents who are admitted have often experienced multiple failed placements. They come to Syringa and are stabilized because of a highly-skilled interdisciplinary team and compassionate, caring staff.”

“Syringa is also fortunate to utilize the services of an on-site medical clinic and pharmacy,” she added. “The new facility is gorgeous! The design promotes the safety, privacy, independence, and quality of life for all residents.”

Construction of the new nursing home was approved during the 2018 session of the Idaho Legislature, and construction began in May 2019. The old nursing home will be demolished later this year after residents have transitioned to the new facility.

If you have questions or know anyone who would benefit from a stay at Syringa, please call Tamara Gillins at 208-539-5038, or Toni Austin, director of nursing, at 208-520-4250.



DIRECTOR'S *Update*

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I don't think I can stress enough how important it is that we all get our flu shots this year. I have mentioned it in several of my "Director's Updates," and I want to encourage you once again. This is one of the most important things you can do for your health, and the health of others, especially in the midst of a global pandemic.

Many of you are used to getting a flu shot in your offices or buildings, but you can add this to the list of things that are changing because of COVID-19. Unfortunately, that may not be happening this year. You should have already received notifications from your HR representative via e-mail about whether flu shots are or are not happening in your location, including information about how to get a flu shot.

You can get your flu shots at primary care clinics, pharmacies, and grocery stores. Even though a typical flu season begins in October and peaks between December and February, the changes brought on by COVID-19 mean it is time to start thinking about when, how, and where you can get immunized.

Because COVID-19 is still circulating in the United States, and we do not know what to expect this flu season, the best way to protect yourself from the flu is with an annual flu vaccine. Although flu vaccines will not prevent the spread of COVID-19, it will help slow the spread of the flu virus.

As always, I appreciate all you do for the people of Idaho, and that includes getting your flu shot this year.

Dave Jeppesen,
Director

COVID Q&A: VACCINE, FLU VS. COVID-19, AND COUNTING RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS

How is Idaho preparing for a COVID-19 vaccine, and will the state be ready when a vaccine is available?

The Department of Health and Welfare has a pandemic plan for vaccine deployment and distribution that will be updated when we know which vaccines will be available and what the priority groups for vaccination will be.

Idaho, like all other states, is still waiting on information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the White House Task Force before the plan can be adjusted to fit this pandemic. The plan includes Idaho's Immunization Information System having the appropriate functionality to both recall patients for their second dose of COVID-19 vaccine and to track any potential adverse events from the vaccine.

What is the difference between COVID-19 and influenza?

As we near the start of the flu season (generally between October and May), it's a good idea to review the symptoms of both. It's an even better idea to get an annual flu vaccine to reduce the chance you and your family will get the flu during this pandemic. The vaccine is safe and the best protection you can get against the flu.

While more is learned every day, there is still a lot we don't know about COVID-19 and the virus that causes it.

Flu and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with the new coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2) and flu is caused by infection with influenza viruses. Because some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone, and testing may be needed to help confirm a diagnosis.

Flu and COVID-19 share many characteristics, but there are some key differences between the two, including some symptoms (loss of taste and smell is a distinct symptom of COVID-19) and who may have the worst outcomes. The [CDC has a great site](#) that lists the similarities, as well as the differences.

Are antigen tests included in your state's positive, negative and total testing numbers? If so, are they reported separately from PCR tests?

Molecular amplification tests (commonly called PCR tests) are the gold standard for determining whether someone has the virus that causes COVID-19. They are the most accurate, but they also take the longest (several hours for the test itself) to perform.

Antigen tests provide a result much more quickly (within minutes), but they are less accurate than PCR tests, and people who are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 could get a false negative. Knowing this, doctors may sometimes prescribe a PCR test to confirm an antigen test result.

Antigen test results are included in Idaho's data dashboard in the number of total tests, but they are not used to calculate percent positivity. Percent positivity is only calculated using PCR tests from laboratories sending both positive and negative results to ensure an accurate calculation.

Antigen results are not currently separate in the total test number, but those counts will be included on Idaho's dashboard soon. They will be categorized as PCR, antigen, and antibody tests.

Thank you to everyone who has done their best to:

- Keep at least six feet between you and others in public
- [Wear face coverings in public places](#)
- Stay home if you are sick
- Wash your hands often
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Disinfect surfaces and objects regularly

Resources

Stay up-to-date with the latest and most accurate information on COVID-19 at the following websites:

- [CDC Coronavirus Disease Website](#)
- [Idaho's Coronavirus Website](#)
- [Idaho Rebounds Website](#)
- [One.Idaho.gov](#)

DHW also posts lots of information, including daily updates on the numbers on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

#MaskUpIdaho!

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The Department of Health and Welfare's Division of Public Health and Office of Communications (along with ONE Idaho) are working together to develop and implement a marketing and communications strategy related to COVID-19 (focused on recommended precautions and thought leadership). The "#MaskUpIdaho" campaign is the next phase of this strategy. The messaging will be shared on social media and through paid channels. Additionally, if you live in the Boise area, be on the lookout for the Valley Regional buses with #MaskUpIdaho messaging.

ONE



DIVISION OF
PUBLIC
HEALTH



SEPTEMBER IS SUICIDE PREVENTION AND RECOVERY MONTH

Mental health issues and substance use disorders are prevalent in Idaho communities – 1 in 4 Idahoans live with some form of mental illness or substance use disorder. It’s imperative that people in Idaho understand how to seek help. Along with the Division of Behavioral Health (DBH), the department is recognizing September as Suicide Prevention and Recovery Month: Finding Hope, Building Resiliency, Supporting Recovery in Idaho.

To address this significant problem, Gov. Brad Little has issued a proclamation to recognize September as Suicide Prevention and Recovery Month to raise awareness about prevention, treatment, and recovery support services in the state. Neighboring states Oregon and Washington have joined Idaho in proclaiming September to be Recovery and Suicide Prevention Month.

DHW encourages all Idaho residents to join a recovery event in your local community to highlight the significance of helping people in need of prevention, treatment, and recovery support services, while also celebrating the accomplishments of people in recovery. To find a recovery center near you, please visit the [Community-Based Supports on the Substance Use Disorder Services home page](#).

To find help near you, please visit the [home page for Idaho Mental Health Services](#).

[See the proclamation](#), and print it for use at local Recovery Month events and for display in your community.

***SUICIDE PREVENTION AND RECOVERY MONTH:
"FINDING HOPE, BUILDING RESILIENCY,
SUPPORTING RECOVERY"***

in Idaho, and I encourage my fellow Idahoans to observe this month with programs, activities, and ceremonies to highlight the promise and the reality that recovery is possible to our communities and our citizens throughout the state.



IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of Idaho at the Capitol in Boise on this 1st day of September in the year of our Lord two thousand and twenty.

BRAD LITTLE
GOVERNOR

LAWRENCE DENNEY
SECRETARY OF STATE

Submitted by the Division of Management Services

Last year, the department embarked on a new type of journey with the DHW Strategic Plan. Our leadership and communications teams began holding weekly accountability meetings to drive and measure progress toward the goals we set ourselves in the Strategic Plan. The idea was to focus on strategic planning work not as an annual task to produce a document, but as a living, breathing process that involves every DHW staff member: our Living Strategic Plan.

This year, the department is committed to advancing this concept even further through new types of communications. Our Living Strategic Plan will be constantly evolving, and we will add new communication tools over the next year and beyond, reaching out to DHW staff, our partners, and the Idahoans we serve. We will develop social media posts, thought leadership articles, PowerPoint presentations for use throughout the department and for external audiences, a monthly feature in *DHW Connection*, and more.

The Living Strategic Plan communications will focus our efforts on three types of content: people, processes, and performance.

People

The work accomplished under the umbrella of our four strategic goals is the result of the hard work of DHW staff throughout the state. There are hundreds of teams who work on day-to-day tasks, plans, and long-term projects that all contribute to the strategic goals. As our teams make headway and complete tasks and projects, we will celebrate these team wins through our Living Strategic Plan communications. By the time we begin working on our next Strategic Plan, the goal is for every DHW staff member to be able to see their work within the Living Strategic Plan.

Processes

Many of the tasks in the Strategic Plan focus on continuing to provide services to Idahoans – but better. As we improve existing processes and initiate new ones, the Living Strategic Plan communications will highlight these improvements – using layman's terms.

Performance

The goal for all work accomplished through our Living Strategic Plan is encompassed in our mission: We are dedicated to strengthening the health, safety, and independence of Idahoans. As we complete this important work that makes a real difference for Idahoans, we will communicate about it by sharing these stories. We will highlight our performance data to show the valuable impact our work makes within Idaho communities.

Stay tuned for more Living Strategic Plan developments to come!

COVID-19

- **Idaho Department of Health and Welfare explains counting of COVID-19 deaths (Sept. 2):** During a weekly Facebook Live, Elke Shaw-Tulloch with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare explained how COVID-19 deaths are recorded and who makes the call if someone died from it or not. The state relies on a certified person to determine the cause of death. That means a coroner, physician, or a health care provider puts on the death report the person died from COVID-19. It is then reported to the state. If someone dies, and they had underlying health conditions, and COVID-19 is listed as their leading cause of death, it's counted as a coronavirus-related death. Shaw-Tulloch also said there are times when COVID-19 wouldn't be the cause of death, such as a traumatic event like a car crash or a fall.
- **Gov. Little: Idaho to remain in Stage 4 for another two weeks (Sept. 3):** Gov. Brad Little announced Sept. 3 that Idaho did not meet the metrics needed to move out of Stage 4 health restrictions. That means Idaho will stay in Stage 4 of its rebounds plan for at least another two weeks. During a press conference at the Statehouse, Little said our latest COVID hospitalization numbers were not where we want to be as Idaho heads into flu season, which will tap the state's healthcare capacity even more while in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Area nursing homes trying to snuff out cases (Sept. 5):** Some nursing homes in north central Idaho are working to halt the spread of COVID-19. According to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, outbreaks were confirmed at Prestige Care and Rehabilitation – The Orchards and the Idaho State Veterans Home in Lewiston. An outbreak at the Good Samaritan Village in Moscow continues, according to the agency. Each Friday, the department releases a report on COVID-19 cases within the state's long-term care facilities.
- **Statewide positive COVID-19 test rate continues to fall (Sept. 5):** For the third week in a row, Idaho has logged a positive COVID-19 test rate below 10 percent. For the week of Aug. 23-29, state officials for the Department of Health and Welfare recorded a 8 percent test rate; this is the most recent week for which data is available.
- **New deadliest day in Idaho for COVID-19 (Sept. 9):** Idaho has set a new record for COVID-19 deaths reported statewide in a single day today, with the state Department of Health & Welfare tally jumping by 17, from 389 deaths on Tuesday to 406 today. Of those, seven were in Ada County and three were in Canyon County. The grim news came as 329 new coronavirus infections were reported statewide today, bringing the ongoing tally to 34,310. That includes 2,267 infections among health care workers, up by 33 from the previous day's report; and 1,536 hospitalizations, up by 34 from a day earlier.
- **Idaho's 14-day moving average stays below 300 COVID cases for 8th day in a row (Sept. 10):** The current stretch began on Sept. 3 when the average hit 295.9 cases per day. After the state's seven health districts reported a combined 263 new confirmed and 52 new probable cases of the coronavirus on Thursday, the 14-day average dropped to 263.4. It has not been that low since July 4.
- **Idaho nursing homes and care facilities report big drop in new COVID-19 cases (Sept. 15):** Six months after the coronavirus pandemic came to Idaho, nursing homes and other care facilities are still battling outbreaks of COVID-19. But the latest reports from state and federal health agencies show a big shift from the fast-growing case numbers of recent months. The latest data from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services show that 38 facilities in the state had a new case of COVID-19 among staff or residents. That's down from 61 the week before. The data show that more than 78 percent of the Idaho nursing homes, assisted living facilities and group homes where COVID-19 has struck since March had no new cases.

IN THE NEWS

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OTHER

- **Father, stepmom arrested in connection with death of 9-year-old Meridian boy (Sept. 2):** A Meridian father and stepmother have been arrested after their 9-year-old son died Tuesday. According to the Meridian Police Department, officers were called to a home in the 1000 block of W. Broadway Avenue at 9:39 p.m. to assist medical personnel with a boy who was not breathing and had no heartbeat. CPR was performed on the child who was transported to the hospital where he was pronounced dead.
- **Diverse group of women – including a state senator and a DHW employee – challenge CWI incumbents in November (Sept. 2):** Each seat on the College of Western Idaho board of trustees has a four-year term and trustees are selected by voters in Ada and Canyon counties, regardless of zone. Trustees Molly Lenty of Zone 2 and Annie Hightower of Zone 4 are not up for reelection. State Sen. Cherie Buckner-Webb, April Baylon-Mendoza, DHW employee, and Samantha Guerrero are running for positions on the board of trustees.
- **Owyhee County reports first Idaho human cases of West Nile virus (Sept. 9):** Idaho's first locally acquired human West Nile virus infections this year have been identified among two Owyhee County residents, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare reported Wednesday. Both residents were over the age of 50, health and welfare reported. One was diagnosed with West Nile fever and the other was identified through blood donor screening. So far this year, West Nile virus activity has been detected in six southwest Idaho counties.
- **Idaho's suicide rate isn't up in 2020. But advocates say COVID-19 stress still a major concern (Sept. 14):** Isolation, unemployment, illness, and waves of major change have put mental health care providers on edge as some Idahoans are in need of help during the pandemic. Despite allegations during the Idaho Legislature's Special Session, including in a House concurrent resolution that failed to pass the Senate, Idaho's suicide rate is not at a record high in 2020 due to the pandemic. Statewide, Idaho has reported fewer suicides in 2020 than we saw in 2018. However, Idaho still consistently has one of the highest suicide rates in the country. While some areas of the state have reported modest increases, 2020's deaths by suicide are very close in number to 2019's deaths by suicide.

"IN THE NEWS" are featured snippets compiled from Idaho news sources, including the Idaho Press, KTVB, Idaho Statesman, Times-News, Post-Register, Lewiston-Tribune, East Idaho News, and more.

SERVICE AWARDS NEWSLETTER

HONORING THOSE WHO HAVE REACHED SERVICE MILESTONES

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The Service Awards Newsletter features several employees with July anniversaries, including **Tamara Prisock** - 35 years, **Michelle Corder** - 25 years. [Click here to see more employees who have earned service awards.](#)