

Our City

COVID-19 and bad information. I was at a 7:30 am. meeting in Pocatello last Friday the 13th where COVID-19 and bad information crossed paths yet again. The time of day is important because information surrounding COVID-19 is changing almost hourly. I was told at that meeting that the first confirmed case in Idaho had been identified in Pocatello – WRONG! Those who told me were well intentioned and in positions to know such things; yet, again their information was not correct. (*The following is as accurate and timely as I can make it.*)

Later that same day, I met with all the local officials associated with the mitigation of the disease including the officials from the office of Southeastern Idaho Public Health. When I shared the information from the previous meeting it was immediately identified as wrong. At that time, 12:15 pm., there were no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Idaho. Three hours later in Boise the first confirmed case was identified. As of **7:15 am.** on March 15th **three confirmed cases** exist; two in Ada County and one in Blaine County, there is also a presumptive case in Teton County as well. March 15th, **9:00 am.**, now **five cases confirmed.** Things are changing faster than they can be effectively reported to everyone.

There have been many questions around COVID-19 testing. Key facts about COVID-19 testing on **March 13, 2020** as reported by the Governor's office include:

- If someone has a fever or cough, they should contact their medical provider to find out if they should be tested for coronavirus.
- People without symptoms will not be tested at this time.
- After ruling out the flu through a rapid flu test, a provider may take a sample from a patient and send it to a lab where the actual coronavirus testing occurs. Most providers can use a simple swab to collect a sample.
- Idaho is fortunate to have a state-run lab that can process coronavirus tests, and the lab is keeping up on testing needs at this time. Privately-run labs also have begun testing for coronavirus.

Idaho is actively working to expand access to testing across the state. Updates and information are available at <https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/>.

In light of that, you and your family need to be cautious, not scared, but careful. It is too late now, but flocking to the stores for TP, disinfectants and other goods is the antithesis of the proscribed protocol – Avoid crowds and close contact. Reportedly, lines at Winco, Walmart and Costco in Pocatello extended down aisles into the parking lots last week.

You do need to protect yourself and our community from getting and spreading a respiratory illnesses like COVID-19. Everyone has a role to play in getting ready and staying healthy. The CDC is aggressively responding to the global outbreak of COVID-19 and that is now community spread in the United States. Community spread means people have been infected with the virus in an area, including some who are not sure how or where they became infected. The CDC is focusing on an all of community approach to slow the transmission of COVID-19 to reduce illness and death, while minimizing social and economic impacts. I am asking that you please do your part.

The Noon meeting last Friday was productive as we formed plans to help minimize the effects of COVID-19 in Power County. These efforts will be directed by Di Jones, the Emergency Manager for Power County, in concert with all healthcare professionals, law enforcement and elected local officials. The protection and safety of our first responders is key in this effort and those protocols are well established and the means will be provided. A weekly meeting schedule has been established and is certainly subject to more frequency should the need arise.

If you are a parent or guardian of a child, information has been sent home to you and is available on the School District's website, <https://www.sd381.k12.id.us>, in regards to the steps the School District is taking to minimize risk for all of its students. The District's Facebook page is also available for information, plus parents and guardians are encourage to sign up for the Remind system of alerts. Please look at that information; it is a critical part of this effort.

While we are hoping that COVID-19 does not become community spread in Power County, hoping won't prevent it, you again have to be an active part in this effort. There are simple steps that you can take to minimize the community spread threat.

#1-Wash your hands frequently: Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Why? Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

#2-Maintain social distancing: Maintain at least 6 feet distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing. Why? When someone coughs or sneezes they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person coughing has the disease.

#3-Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth: Why? Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and make you sick.

#4-Practice respiratory hygiene: Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately. Why? Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

#5-If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early: Seek advice and care given by your healthcare provider.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/workplace-school-and-home-guidance.pdf>

As in most cases the use of common sense and good judgement go a long way in effectively handling the effects of a crisis. By using the above five simple steps you can help us help you minimize the local effects of COVID-19. Also, be sure the information you share is accurate.

Until next week...