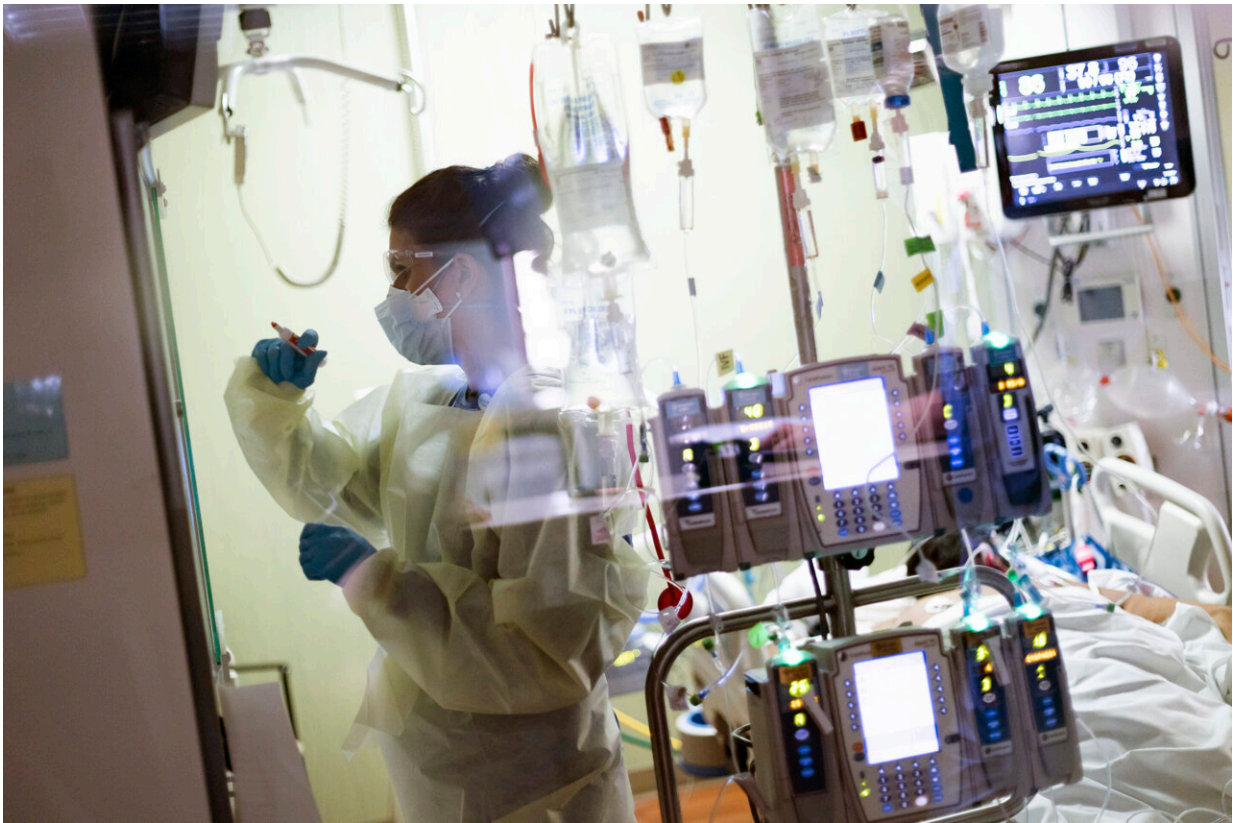


COVID surge pushes much of Idaho toward medical rationing

September 15 2021, by Rebecca Boone



In this Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021 file photo Ann Enderle R.N. attends to a COVID-19 patient in the Medical Intensive care unit (MICU) at St. Luke's Boise Medical Center in Boise, Idaho. Idaho's public health officials say crisis standards of care are "imminent" for the state's most populated region as hospitals in the Boise area continue to be overrun with unvaccinated coronavirus patients. Hospitals in the northern half of the state were given permission to begin rationing care last week. Credit: AP Photo/Kyle Green,File

Idaho's public health officials say crisis standards of care are imminent for the state's most populated region as hospitals continue to be overrun with unvaccinated coronavirus patients.

The southwestern and southern Idaho regions that include Boise and Twin Falls may get official authorization to begin rationing [health care](#)—a step intended to ensure the patients most likely to survive are given access to scarce resources like intensive care unit beds—any day now, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Director Dave Jeppesen said Tuesday.

"We continue to set new records each week," said Jeppesen about coronavirus hospitalizations. "We do not see a peak in sight."

Hospitals in the northern half of the state were given permission to begin rationing care last week, when Kootenai Health in Coeur d'Alene was forced to begin treating some patients in a field hospital set up in a conference center instead of regular hospital rooms.

"Nearly all the metrics we track are trending in the wrong direction," when it comes to coronavirus, deputy state epidemiologist Dr. Kathryn Turner said.

On Sept. 11, the state had more than 600 patients hospitalized with COVID-19, far beyond last winter's peak when 466 people were hospitalized. Coronavirus patients in intensive care units and on ventilators are also setting record highs in the state. The vast majority of them—more than 91%—are not vaccinated against coronavirus.

The highly contagious delta variant is sickening and sometimes killing more younger patients than the original variant, Turner said. In all of 2020, more than half of the COVID-19 deaths were among Idaho residents who were at least 80 years old, according to the department's

numbers. This year, well over half of the deaths are in people aged 50 to 79, and just over 7% of the deaths were among even younger Idaho residents.

But even as the state continues to see new records in the number of people hospitalized or on ventilators with COVID-19, weekly vaccination rates are dropping. About 40,000 [vaccine doses](#) were administered during the week of Sept. 5, according to numbers from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, compared to 57,000 and 67,000 doses each of the two prior weeks.

Still, many of Idaho's most powerful officials have been reluctant to support mask mandates or employment-based vaccine requirements. Idaho Gov. Brad Little has never issued a statewide mask mandate. Last week announced that he was working with Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden to see if they could use the court system to stop President Joe Biden from requiring that large employers mandate COVID-19 vaccines or implement routine COVID-19 testing.

Meanwhile, the governor—like state [health](#) officials—continues to urge residents to get vaccinated against coronavirus.

Such urging has been largely ineffective so far. Idaho remains one of the least-vaccinated states in the nation, with just 50% of its residents fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

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