

Gov. Little activates National Guard again, directs hundreds of new medical personnel to help Idaho hospitals overwhelmed with unvaccinated COVID-19 patients

Tuesday August 31, 2021

Boise, Idaho – Governor Brad Little announced today a last-ditch effort to avoid the first-ever activation of statewide crisis standards of care by adding hundreds of new medical personnel for Idaho hospitals, but he said the real solution to the crisis is more Idahoans choosing to receive the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine.

Nearly all Idaho hospitals are overwhelmed with unvaccinated COVID-19 patients. There are more Idahoans in Intensive Care Units (ICU) with COVID-19 than ever before. The vast majority of them are unvaccinated.

“On a daily call with hospitals this morning, we heard there are only FOUR adult ICU beds available in the entire state, out of close to 400. Where hospitals have converted other spaces to be used as contingency ICU beds, those are filling up too,” Governor Little said. “We are dangerously close to activating statewide crisis standards of care – a historic step that means Idahoans in need of healthcare could receive a lesser standard of care or may be turned away altogether. In essence, someone would have to decide who can be treated and who cannot. This affects all of us, not just patients with COVID-19.”

Governor Little is adding up to 370 additional personnel to assist hospitals with the surge.

- By mobilizing the Idaho National Guard again, up to 150 guardsmen will support short-staffed medical facilities. They will be tasked with logistical support such as screenings, lab work, and other duties.
- In addition, 200 additional medical and administrative personnel will be available to Idaho through a contract with the U.S. General Services Administration.
- A 20-person Department of Defense medical response team will be deployed to North Idaho, where vaccination rates are among the lowest in the state and where they are experiencing the greatest need.

“Idaho hospitals are beyond constrained. Our healthcare system is designed to deal with the everyday realities of life. Our healthcare system is NOT designed to withstand the prolonged strain caused by an unrestrained global pandemic. It is simply not sustainable. Please choose to receive the vaccine now to support your fellow Idahoans who need you,” Governor Little said.

Governor Little highlighted other recent steps he has taken to alleviate the crisis. Last week, he announced the opening of three monoclonal antibody treatment centers across the state, where Idahoans at greatest risk of developing serious complications from COVID-19 will be able to receive therapeutic medications to hopefully avoid hospitalization and help preserve critical capacity in our hospitals.

He also directed new funds to help Idaho hospitals attract and retain the medical staff they need as they compete with healthcare systems across the nation for workers.

In addition, Governor Little’s administration announced this month that temporary licensing fees are waived again for retired or inactive nurses so they can activate their licenses and reenter the workforce more easily during this unprecedented time. This same step last year cleared the way for more than 1,000 nurses and other health professionals to help out.

“I hope it will be enough for us to avoid statewide crisis standards of care, but we are teetering on the brink and there is only one real solution – we need more Idahoans to choose to receive the safe, effective COVID-19 vaccine now,” Governor Little said.

Some Idaho schools have already been forced to transition to remote learning because of COVID-19 outbreaks among staff and families. Addressing the Idahoans who are still on the fence or are just putting off receiving the vaccine, Governor Little said the time to get vaccinated is now, so our kids can have a normal school year.

“I want to thank the more than 818,000 Idahoans who have shown love for their neighbor by choosing to receive the safe and effective vaccine. To the others, please choose to receive the vaccine now to protect lives, help our exhausted medical staff, keep healthcare access available to all of us, keep our workforce healthy, and keep our kids in school,” Governor Little said.

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