

March 20,2020

To the Valley County Community:

As everyone knows by now, we are faced with an unprecedented worldwide crisis related to the COVID-19 viral pandemic. Our hospital providers and staff here in McCall, Cascade, and Valley County, Idaho, like medical providers everywhere in the country, have been preparing rapidly for a response to the arrival of the virus. Facts on the ground are changing hourly, but our outstanding medical staffs are prepared as well as we can be and continue to improve our preparations daily. We are small, rural, critical-access hospitals, and have limited resources, especially as pertains to intensive care. We have protocols to provide emergency care as is needed and to expedite triage to a higher level of care as is necessary. Our medical staffs are highly trained and expert at provision of outstanding care in a rural setting. If you are in Valley County and you have concerning symptoms, isolate yourself and call our COVID-19 hotline at 208-381-9500. You will receive advice and instructions as to how to proceed.

I am currently extremely concerned about the Americans who are not, for whatever reason, taking this medical crisis seriously. It has become apparent that rural resort towns, like McCall, Cascade, and Ketchum, are at unique risk from the pandemic. People are arriving in these towns, in large numbers, from all over the State and Country to take "virus vacations." I can think of little that is more inappropriate and dangerous than this mindset. These people are spreading COVID-19 by refusing to take the CDC advice of social distancing, isolating themselves and their families in their homes, and avoiding unnecessary travel. Ketchum and Blaine County, as of yesterday, have 16 documented cases of COVID-19 infection, 15 of which have come to Blaine County from elsewhere. As a result, they have the first documented case of community spread of the virus in the State of Idaho resulting in an order of community-wide isolation by Governor Little. This explosion of cases in Blaine County is the largest outbreak in the State of Idaho and has happened in a matter of a very few days.

We must avoid reproducing this outcome in other communities like McCall, Cascade and Valley County. Though our hospitals are prepared to care for the citizens of Valley County and surrounding areas, an influx of people from elsewhere risks overwhelming the limited resources at our hospitals. It also continues the spread of the COVID-19 virus. I am, in the strongest terms, insisting that all people considering travel to McCall, Cascade, and Valley County STAY HOME. Do NOT take your Spring Break Vacation here. This is what is best for you and your family and for our community. Under normal circumstances you would be warmly welcomed here, but these are not normal circumstances. Most businesses, hotels, restaurants, and bars are either closed or will be closing soon, (or running on reduced and altered schedules). The ski areas here are closed. Our other recreational opportunities have been severely limited. This is NOT currently a place to take a vacation.

My message to all considering spending Spring Break or beyond in McCall, Donnelly, Cascade or Valley County is:

- Stay home, stay healthy.
- Please let us do our job providing care at this critical moment. We must be available to provide urgent needed care to our citizens.

You will be welcome here with open arms when this unparalleled pandemic is over.

Gregory Irvine, MD

Chief of Staff, St. Luke's McCall Medical Center