

U of I, Regional Universities Model Intervention Strategies for Fight Against COVID-19 Pandemic

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MOSCOW, Idaho — April 15, 2020 — University of Idaho faculty are partnering with Boise State University, Idaho State University, Lewis-Clark State College and Washington State University to model intervention strategies across Idaho during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [Idaho Department of Health and Welfare \(IDHW\)](#) and Gov. Brad Little's Coronavirus Task Force have used the models for information to make health care decisions.

The [State Board of Education](#) on Friday, March 18, sent a request to institutes of higher learning for Idaho-specific modeling on the COVID-19 pandemic. [Holly Wichman](#), director of the Institute for Modeling Collaboration and Innovation at U of I, organized and coordinated the modeling effort. A team of researchers presented the model to the Board of Education and IDHW on Monday, March 20.

"I have no memory of the State Board reaching out to the university community like this before," Wichman said. "In one of our meetings there was even talk about having some sort of inter-university planning committee that would head any collaborations that needed all our universities working together to solve state problems."

IDHW wanted an Idaho-specific epidemiological model that could be used to explore the effect of various interventions on flattening the curve in Idaho.

"We're proud to have our Institute for Modeling Collaboration and Innovation leading COVID-19 modeling for Idaho, in partnership with our sister institutions around the state," U of I President Scott Green said. "This work is on the forefront of the battle against this virus and will help make predictions to benefit our communities and save lives."

Since the original modeling effort, Wichman, [Department of Biological Sciences](#), has been asked to coordinate COVID-19 modeling for the state. Assistant Professor [Ben Ridenhour](#), [Department of Mathematics](#), has worked with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and has experience modeling influenza outbreaks. IDHW will use his model for future planning.

"I'm thankful for the opportunity to apply my background toward the state of Idaho's fight against COVID-19," Ridenhour said. "The University of Idaho, as a land-grant university, is proud to be a partner during this critical time."

IMCI is submitting a request to the National Institutes of Health for emergency funds to support COVID-19 modeling of rural communities. Wichman has assembled a team of about a dozen faculty, staff and postdocs for the work. The team will take COVID-19 modeling requests directly from cities and counties in Idaho.

"IMCI is an institute that's built around modeling," Wichman said. "We hired four new faculty as part of a commitment to a National Institutes of Health grant to build modeling on campus. Three of them are working on COVID now, as are several other faculty supported by that grant and the postdocs in our IMCI Modeling Core."

Wichman said the IMCI team has benefited from partnering with a modeling group at the University of Texas at Austin, among five places that are performing modeling for the CDC. That team is being updated each morning on the state of the pandemic in the United States and planning how the [University of Texas COVID-19 Consortium](#) can address new modeling challenges.

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