



AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 ECONOMIC IMPACT AND RECOVERY

THE RECORD OF ACTION FOR
SEPTEMBER 17, 2020

Supervisor Candace Andersen, Chair
Supervisor Karen Mitchoff, Vice Chair

Present: Chair Candace Andersen
Vice Chair Karen Mitchoff

Staff Present: Thomas Warne, M.D., Deputy County Health Officer
Lynn Mackey, County Superintendent of Schools
Julie DiMaggio Enea, Senior Deputy County Administrator

1. Introductions

Chair Andersen called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m., and introduced Vice Chair, Supervisor Karen Mitchoff, Deputy County Health Officer Dr. Tom Warne and County Superintendent of Schools Lynn Mackey.

2. Public comment on any item under the jurisdiction of the Committee and not on this agenda (speakers may be limited to two minutes).

All public comment was taken after Item 3.

3. RECEIVE update on most recent COVID-19 developments.

Dr. Warne presented updates from Contra Costa Health Services Department.

The County Health Officer issued a new social distancing order effective September 16 to align with the California Blueprint for a Safer Economy. The new blueprint is less confusing, and easier to decipher and anticipate when businesses can open. Under the new blueprint, additional personal care services not involving the face may now open outdoors, racetracks and cardrooms may operate outdoors, film/music/TV production may operate, and professional sports can resume without live audiences. The blueprint maintains guidance on social bubbles.

The County is currently in the Purple or most restrictive tier of four tiers. By taking health and safety precautions, we can help the County move to the less restrictive Red Tier and advance the county's economic and social recovery.

Cchealth.org/corona now has the dashboard updated to align with the State's new metrics. Two main parameters determining Tier placement:

1. # of new cases of virus per day per 100,000 people, averaged over 7 days. We are currently 7.1. To advance to Red Tier, we will need to get below 7 and maintain that for two weeks.
2. Positivity rate, % positive of all new tests in the County. Current rate is 4.7%, which is low enough to move to the Red Tier. We need to keep testing in order to maintain this rate. Testing is fast, free and convenient. Recommends getting tested at least once monthly if even no symptoms. Average turnaround time is 2-4 days.

Current trends indicate that the County may be able to move to Red Tier in October.

The County is working on school waivers for lower elementary grades. 20 have been approved/posted on the State website. We have not denied any applications. The Office of Education is working to strengthen applications. The broader opening of schools will depend on the county moving to the Red Tier.

Confluence of the pandemic with flu season is a concern. A double surge during winter months could overwhelm hospitals. It is possible to contract both COVID and seasonal flu, so Dr. Warne recommends getting a flu shot. Symptoms of COVID-19 and seasonal flu are similar.

CCHealth has developed guidance for Halloween and strongly discourages traditional Halloween trick or treating because it becomes difficult to maintain social distancing and hygiene, particularly between people from different households. It would present an unsafe situation this year.

In response to questions received during previous week:

False positives? Inaccurate tests are a problem but shouldn't prevent the county from getting to the lowest tier. PCR tests and now antigen tests have high sensitivity and specificity. False positives will likely be less than 2%, and that 2% rate applies only to tests that should have been negative so, mathematically, its even much lower than 2%.

In reference to the State switching to median vs. mean/average, Dr. Warne believes that the median will be easier to achieve than the numerical mean.

Dr. Warne clarified that HOA pools can be used in accordance with State guidance for pools. First, a virus prevention plan must be put in place, rules will need to be observed and a pool monitor is required.

He referred people to the State guidance regarding indoor sports camps. The State has guidance about stable cohorts, up to 16, or 14 children and two adults.

Regarding social distancing postings for businesses, and the concern that the required postings reduce visibility and present a security concern, Dr. Warne said that the local health order no longer requires the posting of local health orders at places of business. However, the State guidance requires that most businesses post a checklist (available at the State website) applicable to their business sector.

Regarding school openings, the County is following the State guidance. We are not

being more restrictive than the State in this and with the waiver process. We are ahead of some of the other Bay Area counties in recommending school waivers.

Regarding safety upon school reopening, the State guidance limits size to the “number practicable”. Regarding concerns about cohorts becoming too big, the State guidance is clear and County will not be limiting cohorts beyond what the State requires. Local school districts will craft their own plans in accordance with State guidelines.

Supervisor Andersen invited public comment.

- Mike McDermott cited a report that ranks all states by restrictions and said that California is the most restrictive and has the highest unemployment rate. In that context, there is an opportunity for California to learn from other states’ data, particularly in terms of school openings. Is the County actively looking at other states that are further down the road, to give Contra Costans confidence that we could open schools safely?*
- Eileen expressed concern about psycho-social and mental health of middle and high school students by not permitting them to attend school. She asked if waivers will ever be granted for these age groups.*
- Stella Wotherspoon asked how large or small should school cohorts should be. She discussed the amount of exposure her own child would have due to non-exclusive cohorts. She said the State guidance needs clarity and a firm maximum rather than merely a suggestion. She said safety should be the first priority.*
- Ginalisa works in a veterinary setting that cannot socially distance. She asked if the business has discretion over whether customers are to be allowed in the facility or not.*
- Jared Thomsen asked if there is a way to have a children’s ministry outdoors on the church school property.*
- Brenda Brown, a Center-based childcare provider, asked if her group size can be increased from 10 to 14.*
- Jen Juroff asked why the County changed the cohort size from 15:1 to 14:2 and why are we continuing to be so restrictive on youth sports? She asked at what point is it a family’s choice whether or not to participate in these activities vs. a government decision. She cited a report on 90,000 youth soccer players with less than a 0.5% infection rate.*
- Jenny Tsang referenced pages 15-16 in Lynn Mackey’s presentation, and asked what efforts the County has made to consider this. She asked if the County has contacted green school yards and did any County Supervisor or Superintendent Mackey participate in the September session from green school yards.*
- Juana asked why we do not just permit outdoor schooling with masks, utilizing tents and P95 masks. She asked how to effectively influence State guidelines.*
- Elias Mandilaras asked about the timeline for indoor businesses to open. When we move to the Red Tier, can we open the next day? What is the best-case scenario?*
- Chris Tsu appreciates the County Health Officials holding firm despite the public pressure to relax safety rules. He said that practicable means “able to be done” but doesn’t necessarily mean that a thing “should be done”.*

- *Kirsten's iPhone asked why the county is more restrictive than State Purple Tier on Elementary school waivers. She said County restrictions will make it impossible for public schools to reopen under a waiver.*
- *Unidentified Caller said the school reopening policy is based on flawed logic: it's too dangerous for public schools to open but not too dangerous if they apply for a waiver and get it. Regarding youth sports, she considers competitive swimming as an individual sport rather than a group sport and requested a carve out for swimming.*
- *Bruce Burns, Moraga School District Superintendent and educator, said the decision to close or open schools is very weighty. He expressed appreciation for all involved in the decision-making process.*
- *Casey Copeland asked if the County Office of Education will mandate that public school districts reopen when the county attains the Red Tier. In her observation, the Martinez Unified School District doesn't appear to be doing any planning to reopen.*
- *Carol asked if there will be discussion and guidelines regarding school transportation, busing*
- *Call in User (ToniR) asked who pays for testing and when was the last time CCC hospitals were overwhelmed? She claimed there is a constant drumbeat of negativity and fear from County officials.*
- *Che Horder commented on the mental health impacts of keeping schools closed. She said that full contact sports are being played outside of California with no adverse impacts and wants to bring kids out of isolation. She said we need a better balance.*
- *Jim D said his question about faith-based offices were previously answered via the State guidance and had no further questions.*
- *Jerry L asked if there is a study on the efficacy of masks. He asked at what point he could be treated as a responsible adult and not a child of the government, saying that government control and direction has gotten out of hand.*
- *Lisa expressed concern about school districts not wanting to open even when it will be permissible. She asked at what point, if any, will their hand be forced, and what actions could be taken?*
- *Peter Griffin said it's been six months and asked what Tier will permit playgrounds to be opened.*
- *"Unlimited" spoke about the hypocrisy of lawmakers regarding the seriousness of the virus. He called the guidelines tyranny disguised as smiling government officials. He said that Hitler didn't control Germany alone but did it through people he used as tools. He described the negative impact on businesses and families and said that destruction caused by government is worse than that caused by COVID-19.*
- *Amanda asked when colleges are going to be opened.*
- *Diane's iPhone asked for accountability by the tyrants for the huge decline in education. She demanded a plan to reopen schools and put kids first. She asked why we continue to pay taxes for services not provided, and why private schools are being opened but not public schools.*

Chair Andersen thanked the speakers for their input and said that while we do not always agree on these issues, she and other officials will continue to make decisions

they believe are in the best interest of community safety. She emphasized the importance of education and said each school district will make its own plan for reopening.

Dr. Warne explained that the guidance on cohort size has evolved over the last few weeks. The State guidance said the maximum size is 16, which the County had interpreted as 14 children and two adults. However, there is flexibility: it can also be interpreted as 15:1 in certain circumstances. Higher needs children might require a higher ratio of adults to children.

The State has developed specific guidelines for different business sectors. That specificity may seem arbitrary, but they must be sufficiently discrete to be applicable across the state. Once we move to Red Tier, businesses permitted to open in that Tier will not have to wait for a specific County health order.

Dr. Warne said that swimming can proceed in certain circumstances such as a stable swim club operating within the State guidelines. Swim meets can theoretically be done with proper social distancing between lanes and complying with other guidelines.

Currently, playgrounds are not allowed to open in any Tier. We must wait for clearance from the State. He recommended that parents look for opportunities within the guidelines to create social interaction for their kids, such as a stable playgroup.

Veterinary offices without adequate space to do social distancing can use masking to minimize virus transmission. Look for ways to accommodate and maintain distances with owners as much as possible.

With reference to learning from the experience of other states, Dr. Warne agreed that we should be doing more to learn from other states and that this point is very well taken.

He concluded by imploring people to continue to follow the prevention measures and get tested to move our county to the Red Tier.

Chair Andersen said that health insurance will be billed for test costs first. Dr. Warne said the test costs are decreasing. In general, the public is not paying for the tests. If insurance will not pay, then County will pay with CARES Act funds. He said the cost of testing is predictable. The costs of not testing would be very high.

Vice Chair Mitchoff said that people are reporting being denied tests by Kaiser unless they are symptomatic. A reminder will be going out to all county hospitals that anyone can be tested with or without symptoms. If a person is being denied a test, he is instructed to come to the County Hospital for a test. You can schedule online or on the phone.

Testing will assist the County is attaining and maintaining a less restrictive Tier assignment.

She asked that we set our individualism aside in this case and consider the benefit that getting tested will have on others.

4. DISCUSS issues associated with school closures and the preparation for the reopening of schools for 2020-2021.

Chair Andersen introduced County Superintendent of Schools Lynn Mackey. Ms. Mackey acknowledged the very differing opinions on the reopening of schools evidenced by the callers' comments today and said it mirrors similar impassioned input received by her office. Some ask why we aren't opening schools already while others ask why we are considering putting students in harm's way by opening schools. People are very divided on the issue.

She explained the decision-making process. Absent a health order or order from the State or local office, the decision to open or close is up to each local school board. County Schools was waiting for State guidance on how to incorporate all the prevention strategies into the school administration. First, schools were bound by the State's watch list and now the four Tiers. Schools cannot open fully until we attain the Red Tier.

The County Office of Education checks the waiver applications for responsiveness and completeness, and then passes the waivers to the Health Department for review. 31 waivers have been received and 27 have been passed to Health so far. The State approved 16 so far. Public schools have not applied for waivers primarily because of the way public schools are funded and currently staffed. It would not be feasible for public schools to operate with just small cohorts, where one teacher is with the same cohort the entire time. Once we are in the Red Tier, she predicts that schools won't be able to immediately reopen. There will likely be a sort of hybrid model developed using cohorts split between one or more teachers.

She recommended that parents who are struggling with distance learning for their children contact the teachers directly and then the school principal. Possibly, that school can offer an accommodation. Each school district decides whether it will offer specialized supports for high need students.

All the educators want students to come back to school. Once the county attains the Red Tier, each school board will decide its own reopening plan. County Schools will provide guidance that aligns with the State, but the decisions will be made locally by each district and be influenced by local factors. For example, master scheduling is very complex, and it might not make sense to reopen just before the end of a grading period.

Training was recently provided to childcare workers who support distance learning. Because each school board sets the schedule and plan, we need to understand that childcare workers need support. Ms. Mackey promised to bring this matter to the attention of local school superintendents. She is looking into the development of in-person learning scholarships for special needs students.

Regarding school transportation, Districts will survey to determine if any parents are willing to transport students. Only a limited number of students will be allowed on a bus due to social distancing, so they are presently trying to assess the numbers and needs.

She said that high schools and middle schools are not prohibited from using cohorts once they reopen but incorporating cohorts at that school level would be challenging due to curriculum.

She concluded by saying she personally understands the challenges for parents as she is similarly concerned about her grandson. She said she intends to continue attending the County's COVID-19 meetings since schools will likely continue to be a topic of high interest.

Chair Andersen thanked Ms. Mackey for the information she shared.

5. RECEIVE and APPROVE the Record of Action for the September 3, 2020 meeting.

The Committee approved the Record of Action for the September 3, 2020 meeting as presented.

AYE: Chair Candace Andersen, Vice Chair Karen Mitchoff
Passed

6. The next meeting is currently scheduled for October 15, 2020.

Chair Andersen confirmed the next scheduled meeting date of October 15, 2020 unless changing circumstances warrant the scheduling of a special meeting.

7. Adjourn

Chair Andersen adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m.

For Additional Information Contact:

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