

**September 8, 2020 D.3**  
**Update on Covid-19**

Anna Roth, County Health Director and Dr. Chris Farnitano, Public Health Officer.

Ms. Roth recently visited the Contra Costa Regional Medical Center and commends the leadership for their preparedness, excellent suggestions and ideas, their optimism, and especially for the herculean effort they have shown in providing compassionate care for their patients.

Contra Costa County currently has recorded 14,712 positive cases, many of which have been resolved. The County has tested over 212,000 people. Our positivity rate, the amount of tests positive is about 6.2% currently, an improvement over August figures.

She noted that the State has implemented a new tier-based monitoring list, with four tiers. Contra Costa is in a purple tier (most restrictive) Specifically, areas of focus that Contra Costa County 're focusing on are -- Contra Costa County have specific areas of concern, geographies as Contra Costa County II as subsets of the population.

The County's areas of focus at this time, where the highest rates in the past 14 days have been are in Bay Point and San Pablo. Those communities have had rates twice as high as the County as a whole. Others with higher rates -- with higher rates as a whole are Antioch, El Sobrante, Pacheco and Pittsburg.

Two additional testing centers have been opened in West County and we are working through our community engagement team to continue to contact with these communities. We have now brought on board youth ambassadors. The first cohort of 25 youth ambassadors who are going to be working to get the word out in those communities on both how you can protect your loved ones and the people around you to stop the spread and crush the curve in our County . A second cohort of youth ambassadors in will come on board September and these ambassadors are actually being sponsored by the city of San Pablo and Contra Costa County. Exploration of a partnership with the County Office of Education is also in the works.

Contra Costa County's 7-day testing average right now is just over 1,500 at 1,527. Our aim is to get to 2,800 a day. There have been a variety of challenges with that, including smoke and extreme heat. Many of the testing sites, being outdoors, were forced to close early. Therefore the County is looking to move all testing indoors to manage these challenges and in preparation for fall weather. Again, specifically targeting particular populations.

The community engagement team has been working hard and new social media toolkits are available at the [cchealth.org](http://cchealth.org) website. The communications officer is working with the Bay Area public offices on a Bay Area wide basis because Contra Costa is not the only County experiencing needs with particular populations, specifically, the Latinx population and young people. The County strives to reach out to all historically marginalized communities to educate and increase testing. Mobile pop-up testing sites are being explored as an option. The Richmond site will open for drive-through testing September 16<sup>th</sup>, increasing testing there by 200 more a day. Additionally planned is evening hours at some sites.

The lag time between testing and receiving results has been resolved. At this time 98% of our tests are back within 2-5 days.

A lot of progress has been made and Health Services would like who is working in high contact settings with the public, that would be like essential workers, people working at restaurants, people who are personal care servers like cutting hair to get tested at least monthly. The County has the capacity now and quicker turnaround for results.

In August, the County following 54 outbreaks. We are now down to 32 active outbreaks. Since the last report in August, we have launched a learning and training collaborative with the support of our Contra Costa Regional Health foundation where the County is creating a virtual learning network and working with experts around the Bay Area and country who are supporting best practices and sharing of best practices with infection control in these long-term care facilities.

In detention, which is another high risk congregate setting, we continue to screen all individuals on the entry of the detention facilities and if they are staying, they are separated and quarantined, if you will, for their initial period in their screening is done, which is approximately ten days. The County has initiated a pilot of testing and we plan to move forward with that and into a really good testing in those high risk sites.

There is currently one positive case in detention, in total there have been 31. Along with the testing, there's tracing.

Ms. Roth thanked the Board for its continued support in bringing on workers. There are now 215 individuals working on case and contact tracing and we are now able to reach on a regular basis approximately 2/3 of all people who are testing positive.

The learning about Covid-19 continues. It is now known that one-on-one services pose less risk than things that are involving a large group. So there is more confidence in opening things like nail salons and personal services such as massaging outdoors. Restaurants where you remove your mask to eat and drink are higher risk. But still restaurants operating outside is better than inside.

Spread on hard surfaces is less of a concern than originally thought. Being near people outside your immediate family or your living unit means higher risk. The amount of time that you spend with others matters. Contacts that are lasting more than 15 minutes are riskier than ones that are less than 15 minutes, which is why social gatherings continue to be discouraged if you are gathering that you are encouraged to be using the safest practices possible. Younger people are out in the community most because we know they make up a large amount of the essential workers and they have a lot of movement. We are seeing an increase positive testing rates in that group of people. And sometimes it's for socializing. But most often it's really for them to go to work. That's what our tracing is telling us.

The County has been housing people through Project Room Key in hotels and those are remaining above 95% capacity. We also have submitted an application for the governor's new program called Project Home Key, to purchase the hotel for much more permanent housing. And that has passed the first threshold of the state.

The County has gotten positive feedback and what we know is funds have been reserved to purchase the Motel 6 in Pittsburg to provide temporary housing and support services. It won't replace what needs to come after that, but the state has reserved dollars for acquisition for us.

Ms. Roth reminds us that while Covid-19 is levelling off, flu season is arriving. She urges everyone to get a flu vaccination and a Covid test. She reminds all that they are not being a burden, Health Services wants to see you!

Dr. Farnitano, Public Health Officer notes that since the surge of Covid cases in June, the numbers have been flattening and improving. New cases across California have begun dropping. They are now under approximately 100 cases a day in Contra Costa. The trends in hospitalization have been improving also. Unfortunately there are still seeing 1 to 2 deaths from the virus daily

The State has launched what they are calling a blueprint for business reopenings to make them more regular and predictable. It's a more cautious and measured plan compared to this prior we had the state monitoring list, and counties that were either on or off the monitoring list.

It is a tiered system, tiers are listed, one through four, color coded. The state is now updating their statistics weekly, on Tuesdays. There is a the week long lag, they are posting today which is a tuesday, based on the weeks ending the week of august 29th. Decisions for moving from one tier to another will be based on those updated numbers every Tuesday.

Based on the numbers they are posting today, we are still in the purple tier but our numbers are still continuing to improve. We need to meet the requirements for the red tier for at least two weeks before we can meet those criteria. It is possible that Contra Costa will meet the criteria to move to the red tier as soon as September 22<sup>nd</sup>. Schools will reopen in person when we have been in the red tier for two weeks. So, able to open without a waiver in October if all goes well.

And so it's really the case rate that's going to be curriculum. The state does also adjust that case rate based on the amount of testing. So if we're testing above the state average rate then we get a credit for that rate. If we're testing below that, we're adjusted in the opposite direction. So the more testing we can do, that helps us are progress through the tiers.

So testing is important that way. But of course the most important reason for testing is to isolate and quarantine and we can stop the spread.

We really want to focus our testing on people who are out in the community more because of their work or because of other interactions with the public that we want to encourage people to get tested on a regular basis so we can find those including the asymptomatic ones, which make up 40% of the cases. Those who are asymptomatic can spread Covid to other people who can get sick.

The County has a schools team that has been reviewing the elementary school waivers and we have already approved 10 elementary schools to move so in-person learning. There are about a dozen more schools that have applied and the schools team has been working with those and reviewing those applications. And once Contra Costa moves into the red tier and has been in the red tier for two weeks waivers will no longer be required and schools can open in person just following the local and state guidance on school operations.

Antigen tests are starting to become available. The traditional tests we are mostly using are based on analysis of DNA. They are very specific and more expensive, they have to be run in a formal lab and are not as sensitive so they are approved just for testing people with symptoms, the antigen testing. They are not good in picking up Covid in people without symptoms.

Nursing homes throughout our county and throughout the country are being provided with point of care testing kits that are provided to nursing homes. Again nursing homes have seen the highest mortality due to the frail elderly residents they care for. Doing everything we can to manage and prevent outbreaks in nursing homes is so important, so the federal government is providing for nursing homes.

The red flag warnings for extreme heat and the possibility of public safety power shut-offs present challenges. The other thing I want to bring out that is not Covid-related is around public safety power shutoffs. The County is planning for the eventuality of power loss, with focus on individuals who depend on medical equipment powered by electricity.

The plan has been improved by the lists of individuals who have this equipment ahead of time instead of waiting for the public safety power shutoff to be announced we have gotten the information from Medicare and from PG&E ahead of times.

We can do automated telephone calls and notifications so we can get the information out quickly to make sure those people are aware of the issues, if they don't have a good plan for dealing with the issue. The sign up for emergency alerts and notifications is [cwsalerts.com](https://www.cwsalerts.com) to get phone call or text notification.

When asked what would be of greatest assistance to get the virus more controlled, Dr. Farnitano requested more staff for testing sites. He also recommended that in addition to following safety protocols that people encourage their coworkers and family to get tested once a month. For instance, in a group of ten employees, someone would be getting tested every few days and would detect the virus before it was widespread. He reminded us that anyone providing childcare should consider themselves an essential worker and be tested once a month. He further recommends that anyone in the high risk category get a high-dose flu vaccine if at all possible, at the minimum get a regular flu vaccine.

Supervisors Andersen and Mitchoff noted they have received many hostile and erroneous claims from the public during the Coronavirus Ad Hoc Committee meeting. They clarified for the public that the cause of death listed on a death certificate will be the primary cause of that death. The claims that all deaths are being attributed to Covid-19 or that anyone testing positive will be recorded as having died from the virus is untrue.

When a vaccine for Covid-19 does become available, Health Services will draw upon experience gained from the H1N1 (swine) flu virus for rapid deployment. Plans for distribution are already being drawn up. In addition to public health services outlets, they will collaborate with community partners such as Kaiser Permanente, John Muir, pharmacies and private clinics. Current testing sites would be utilized, as well as possible mobile sites.