

December 15, 2020
D.3 Covid 19 update

Anna Roth, Health Services Director

Anna reported that the county's initial 9,715 COVID-19 doses of the Pfizer vaccine arrived at 7:30 this morning. All doses will be distributed to acute care hospitals in the county to immunize front line workers who are working in high exposure settings, such as the emergency department and intensive care units (ICU). Allocations are based on the number of staff they have working in high-risk settings.

Contra Costa Health Services formed a committee with broad representation, including Contra Costa health services staff, representatives with knowledge of hospitals, emergency services, community health clinics, congregate care facilities and the community to ensure an equitable, clear and transparent approach to distributing this COVID-19 vaccine. The committee has been tasked with ensuring the county vaccine distribution considers the guidelines issued by both the state as well as the federal government.

The State says that vaccine will be made available to staff. Residents at skilled nursing facilities and other congregate living facilities will be vaccinated via a partnership with CVS and Walgreens. Those immunizations are scheduled to begin the week of December 28th. The County has requested more doses of vaccine to continue with our vaccination of front line workers and expects 22,000 more doses next week, with a consistent delivery of further shipments after that. Exact dates of their arrival is not yet known.

Health Services has great confidence in the emergency authorization from the FDA in regard to the safety of the vaccine. Ms. Roth reminds us that it has already been tested on tens of thousands of people. More is continually be learned about the vaccine as is it used around the world.

While Contra Costa is receiving regular shipments of the vaccine, it will be some time before everyone has an opportunity to receive it, so it is crucially important people continue measures to prevent the spread:
Wear a mask and face coverings when you go out, maintain that physical distance, when you're outside of your home, avoid gatherings that involve people that are outside of your household and wash your hands regularly.

Dr. Christopher Farnitano

Despite this good news of the vaccine arrival, we are still facing our worst wave of Covid.

Nationwide, the death toll from this pandemic topped 300,000 in the United States on Monday, December 14th. The country is recording almost 3,000 Covid-19 deaths almost every day. The U.S. also recorded 110,000 current Covid-19 hospitalizations on Monday, which is also setting a new record high, since the pandemic began.

Hospitals are being stressed across the country. In California, hospitals in the San Joaquin Valley reported on Saturday that their ICU bed capacity was zero. Zero for the first time. The region's capacity was 1.5% on Monday but the situation in the Central Valley and southern California is that they're essentially out of ICU beds. Overall ICU capacity across California dropped to 7.4% on Monday. In the Bay Area in the last few days the percentage of ICU beds available has been between 15% and 17%. This is even despite the reopening of a hospital in Napa Valley that had been closed for three months due to wildfire damage.

Two weeks ago, the state predicted the Bay Area would fall below the 15% ICU capacity sometime this week and we are still on track for that to happen.

More than 77% of the state is under a regional stay at home order, in hopes of easing the pressure on a stretched thin health care system, but we haven't seen the full effect of those orders yet.

- December 14th a record 42,000 new cases were reported statewide.
- Contra Costa County has 181 Covid-19 cases in local hospitals. Of the county's 183 ICU beds, 133 are in use.
- 133 out of our 183 ICU beds are in use in Contra Costa County, for covid and other life threatening medical conditions.
- The case rate now is at 36 cases per day per every 100,000 residents.
- The percent of our tests that are testing positive has now increased to 7.6%. For the lowest quartile of our healthy places index, index places, 12.12%, which again highlights the disproportionate impact on disadvantaged communities.
- There were 8284 covid tests performed across the county last week.
- The percentage of tests that come back positive is still climbing.
- Assuming that we're missing cases because of some people not getting tested, many experts assume we're missing four out of every five cases, and it could be as high as one out of every 40 county residents have contracted Covid just in the past two weeks.
- The Bay Area hit a record 21 deaths reported in one day on Thursday, December 10
- It broke that record, with 25 deaths reported on Friday, December 11
- In Contra Costa County, three deaths due to Covid were reported on Wednesday, December 9, the youngest of those was 59 years old; three deaths due to Covid reported on December 10, the youngest of those was 71 years old; on December 11, six deaths reported, the youngest of those was 45 years old.
- The number of deaths declined over the weekend, but many more are expected this week
- December will be our deadliest month yet based on the number of positive cases
- The county has been averaging over 500 new cases diagnosed every day since the Thanksgiving weekend.
- For perspective, for 500 cases, one can expect 60 of those will wind up in a hospital bed; 15 of those will wind up in an ICU bed, ten of those cases will be on life support, fighting for their life on a ventilator.
- In fact, we can almost be certain that december will be our deadliest month just based on the number of cases that we've seen so far. You know, been averaging over 500 new cases diagnosed every day since the thanksgiving weekend. And so that to put that in perspective, for 500 cases, we had -- expect 60 of those will wind up in a hospital bed. 15 of those will wind up in an icu bed, ten of those cases will be on life support, fighting for their life on a ventilator.. and about five of those will die

In preparation for this unprecedented impact on hospitals, the state has implemented new nurse to patient ratios. A nurse caring for a patients not on a ventilator may now be assigned to three patients versus the previous two. ,

Dr. Farnitano expects that all hospitals would do everything possible, including limiting nonurgent surgeries, before turning to reduced staffing ratios.

For those that end up in the ICU unit of the hospital during the surge for whatever reason, there es a risk that they might not get the same level of nursing care as we've come to expect. In preparation for the surge hospitals have added additional beds and purchased extra ventilators.

Hospitals in the spring had about 200 additional surge beds identified and they've identified an additional 200 on top of that so an additional 400 surge beds have been identified in these hospitals. The issue is being able to staff those beds, ICU level care. Especially nurses and doctors.

Dr. Farnitano addressed the stay at home order that went into effect, late Sunday night, December 13, 2020.

Under the order, outdoor dining at restaurants is closed. Experts across the country state the science is pretty clear, that Covid-19 is a respiratory virus that spreads when people are close together. Gatherings of people, social or otherwise, pose a risk of virus transmission even with social distancing and even with the use of face coverings. Although both of things help, neither is 100% effective in preventing transmission of this virus. The Covid-19 spreads further when people talk loudly, cough, sneeze, sing, or yell. The risk of infection is higher indoors than outdoors but even outdoor gatherings can result in infections, particularly in locations

where people remove their masks to eat or drink. So large gatherings are more risky than small gatherings and the more time you spend close to other people, especially longer than 15 minutes, raises a risk compared to brief interactions. So an outdoor restaurant is essentially a prolonged outdoor gathering of people who are not wearing masks.

Including several factors, extended time, being unmasked and being around lots of other people.

So what was safe two months ago, when the community transmission was very low and we were at 3 cases per 100,000, is not at the same level of safety, it's much more dangerous when we're out at over 36 cases per 100,000 per day. The same activity is 12 times as risky just based on that community prevalence as it was a couple months ago.

Case investigations are ongoing. We reach 70 to 80% of cases but only 40% of those are willing to even share their contact information. Most people report they do not know where they got virus. So we have to rely on the science of how this virus has spread, what we know about this virus, and what we know about different types of activity related to those mechanisms of virus spread.

We know that staying at home got us over the curve in the spring and avoided a New York City type scenario in the Bay Area. If we all do our part, we can do this again. Staff has heard a lot of feedback that is confusing when the local rules have small differences from the state rules, so the County's latest stay at home order aligns with the state's regional stay at home order. When the state clarifies or makes minor changes to that order, it will automatically be reflected in the local order.

On behalf of our worn-out and exhausted front line health care workers who have been working day in and day out with their n-95 masks and face shields and gowns all day long, every day they work, and on behalf of all the lives you will be saving by your actions in the next few critical weeks, Dr. Farnitano asks every one of our community members to stay at home and avoid having contact with others, avoid going out, whether it's at a business or a social setting, unless it's absolutely necessary.

The pandemic has far exceeded what the impact that annual flu cases would have on the hospitals. Never before has the country seen nationwide shortages of ICU beds and regular hospital beds. Never before have hospitals been unable to transfer patients to another facility, because they are out of beds too. No flu season, bad or average, has taken this kind of toll on hospital resources.

For those of the public who say that no known cases have been traced to a gym or outdoor dining, Dr. Farnitano reminds us that in the majority of cases examined by the contact tracers, the person does not know where they contracted the virus. The comparison of persons going into stores versus eating outdoors is not equivalent. The vast majority of people in stores are wearing a mask continuously. Those eating are not. Covid is a respiratory virus transmitted primarily by the exchange of air between people, not touch. The rate of mask compliance in stores is also much higher than in eating establishments.

The Board encourages all people to support local businesses using takeout options. Supervisor Mitchoff will be bringing forth an item on the next meeting agenda regarding lowering the fees for delivery services for Contra Costa County in order to aid small businesses.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) at the federal level, and the State, have provided guidelines for allocation of the vaccine. The federal framework uses phases:

Phase 1a includes people working in health care settings, where there is exposure to patients or infectious material, long term care facilities residents and staff. The state essentially took the phase 1 and broke it down into three tiers:

The first tier, the highest tier, is workers in acute care hospitals, which include psychiatric hospitals, workers in skilled nursing facilities and assisted living facilities and their residents, and folks who are involved in transporting patients like 911 ambulance staff, paramedics, emts, also people working at dialysis centers.

Tier 2 within that phase 1a which is intermediate care facilities, those are lower level care facilities and also home health care staff, community health workers, public health staff, primary care clinic and office staff, and urgent care center staff.

Tier 3 is other type of health care workers like specialty clinics, lab workers, dental clinics, pharmacy staff, so those are all the tiers within that phase 1a.

The federal Phase 1b includes essential workers. Non healthcare, essential workers, such as people working at restaurants, people working in agriculture, Police, law enforcement, teachers, people working in manufacturing, and communications, transportation, those other type of essential workers.

Phase 1c includes people who are at higher risk of severe illness and also includes anyone over age 65, whether they have medical conditions or not.

Phase 2 is basically the rest of the population.

The CDC will be meeting this coming weekend to talk more about Phase 1b and 1c. There may be some additional fine tuning or adjustments or clarifications around that phase 1b and 1c that comes out of those discussions and the state also may have more input on that.

So at our local level, our ethical and equitable allocation committee is really looking at how do we apply these federal and state guidelines, you know, to the local level when it gets down into the nitty-gritty about how many doses certain hospital gets, are the congregate living facilities really being covered by cvs-walgreens plan, and ensuring that we can really implement the guidelines in an equitable and ethical way, leaving no one out of the process.

The County is following the state's guidelines on schools very carefully. Health Services began reviewing and approving elementary school waivers in early September. In mid October Contra Costa moved into the red tier, as our cases declined and schools were allowed to open. So several schools began their reopening. Health Services has been working closely with the schools, meeting with superintendents, reviewing plans, offering feedback, and addressing any outbreaks, which have been few and far between.

The county supports the approach that the state has, that allowing those schools if they choose to, to continue to stay open that have been opened, trying to maximize those benefits. It is hoped that once we get past this surge and our cases decline again then there will be more schools that feel ready to open. The issues in schools are difficult. Teachers are concerned about their exposure risk, parents are concerned, both with exposing their kids at school but also acknowledge some people are thriving at distance learning and some are not. The County feels it's really best that those difficult decisions be made at the described school level decision, while we're working to support the schools so that if they do decide to stay open that we're can helping them following the safety guidelines to help them do it as safe as possible.