

February 9 2021
D.6 Covid Update Report

Ms. Roth, Gilbert Salinas, Chief Equity Officer, and Dr. Tavano thanked Gigi Crowder, Executive Director of NAMI Contra Costa (National Alliance on Mental Illness) bringing forward and the Board for adopting the resolution recognizing next week, February 14-21st, African-American Health Week and February 15th as a day to remember Jared Hall.

Anna Roth, Health Services Director

Hospitalizations in Contra Costa hit a peak in January. Since then hospitalization cases and case rates have been declining nationwide.

The vaccines arrived on December 15th. Contra Costa has to date administered 174,000 doses. Like all states, California continues to struggle with scarcity as well as how best to administer the vaccine. The guidelines have been revised several times since December. Health Services has been working closely with the equitable allocations committee to meet the needs of the community.

In line with state guidelines, healthcare workers and those 75 years and older were vaccinated first. That has recently been expanded to everyone 65 and older. In Contra Costa County, 62% of the deaths occurred in people 75 and over (85% of those 65 and older). Using the Healthy Places Index (HPI) there has been prioritization of reaching those living in the lowest quartile, the hardest hit communities, and where disparities in race and ethnicity can be addressed.

Gilbert Salinas, Chief Equity Officer

A great deal of effort is being placed toward eliminating gaps in equity. There are more than 40 permanent sites across the county, that we are partnering with to vaccinate residents across the County. Over 20,282 vaccinations have been administered to residents and staff working at skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities and low income housing units. The partnership, CVS and Walgreens pharmacies, have done 80% of the vaccinations while Contra Costa Health Services has done 20%. The mobile clinics are proving to be effective. Health Services has gone from allocating a few hundred a week to 3,500 a week for our mobile clinics. These mobile clinics and pods are how the vaccine gets to those that need it most, the most impacted areas. The pods have been deployed to care facilities and residence complexes throughout the county.

Collaboration with organizations like United Latino Voices, the NAACP and others continues. Call center capacity continues to expand to reach those who find it easier to schedule appointments via phone. Under consideration now is a call center agent, specifically to reach out to churches and community based organizations in the community so they are not having to call the main line and wait. Appointment times are being set aside for them.

The Help Your Neighbor Campaign has launched so that volunteers can help loved ones and neighbors register for the vaccine. Feedback from this effort has been excellent. There is hope to expand on this.

Members of the Contra Costa Health Plan and existing patients of the medical center and clinics, are receiving direct texts, reminding them, inviting them to get vaccinated. In the coming weeks, there will be expansion of the pilot project to reach, schedule and vaccinate the farm worker population. Vaccination slots have been set aside for this group. The pilot test was conducted over the weekend.

A mass vaccine event is being contemplated for locations such as the Concord Pavilion and school sites. Space is available. At this time, we are waiting on vaccine supply to catch up with capacity and demand. We can start prioritizing front line workers, sharing community messages about how important it is to get the vaccine when it's your turn.

We have an advertising campaign to focus on how important the vaccine is protecting your family. Work is ongoing to develop many methods of getting the message to the community, including radio ads. Adult ambassadors will be hired to further the day-to-day community outreach.

The greatest challenge at this time, is lack of supply. As of last week, we have almost 10,000 more appointments than vaccine to give.

Chris Farnitano, M.D., Public Health Officer

Health Services has a dedicated schools team that is actively supporting the development of reopening plans for schools and partnership for school districts and the Department of Education. These plans are to allow districts to safely resume in-person instruction when the state allows, in concordance with district level decisions.

Ultimately, the school districts make the final decisions about when and how to bring students back on campus. According to the state data, the school districts may choose to reopen grades k-6 starting February 10, 2021. We have reached five days where we were below the threshold where states are allowed to resume k-6, in-person education below 25 cases per hundred thousand per day. Higher grades, 7-12, will be allowed to open when our county is in the state's red tier for at least five days.

The goal is to get kids back to school while at the same time protecting and supporting our residents and communities in contra costa, and to do so in a thoughtful way using the best evidence with keen attention to safe school operations to make sure that the schools are safe places for teachers, school staff and students to be at. It's important that vaccination is not a prerequisite or requirement for schools to open under the state guidelines. Schools can open before staff is vaccinated and many are choosing to do so. Fourteen schools have submitted plans to reopen, including nine public districts, three charter schools and a couple of parochial schools.

Something new this last week, reflecting a Supreme Court ruling, the State has updated requirement on churches and is allowing indoor worship services 25% capacity indoors following the other safety requirements. It's important to point out that just because something is allowed by the state, doesn't necessarily mean that it's not without risk, and indoor religious gatherings are still considered much higher risk than outdoor ones. Under the guidelines, chanting and singing are still not allowed indoors because of their high risk factor in spreading the virus.

Most variants are not of significant concern. The foremost is the B117 or UK variant, first reported in the United States in December 2020. There is concern this may spread much more easily. Whether the variant is more dangerous health wise is not yet known. As of February 5, 2021 there have been 611 cases in the U.S., 145 of those in California, mostly in the San Diego area. Another variant known as the South Africa variant was detected in the U.S. for the first time last week, with none yet detected in California. The concern is that lab studies suggest it may be more resistant to the vaccine. The Brazilian variant has been detected twice in Minnesota. None in California. This variant seems to reinfect people who have already had covid-19. The California variant has recorded 800 cases, a few in Contra Costa County. Surveillance of this variant is just now increasing. Contra Costa County has purchased and will receive in the next few weeks it's own sequencing machine to help in that effort.

Most important is to decrease the amount of virus circulating in the community to control the establishment of variants.

Seniors were the first priority in vaccination. The county is now in a place to move to targeted categories of essential workers: food service workers, grocery workers, farm workers, etc. The activities will scale up as more vaccine supply is available. Appointments will soon open up to the essential worker classifications.