

## **Covid Update Report**

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Anna Roth, Contra Costa Health Services Director

Covid-19 has continued to devastate the world, our country and our county. According to data compiled by Johns Hopkins university as of September 20, 2021 more than 675,000 people in the United States have died from Covid-19, with the current rising rate of an average of more than 1900 fatalities a day. What that means is that Covid-19 is now the deadliest pandemic in U.S. history, exceeding the death toll of the 1918 influenza pandemic known as the Spanish flu. Last week we also passed a grand milestone where data was released that 1 in 500 Americans have now died from the virus. At this time in Contra Costa County there are 135 people hospitalized with Covid-19, with 54 of those in the critical care units. While the peak of the summer long surge seems to have passed the county's daily case rate remains as high as it was in February.

Throughout this pandemic Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS) has used every tool available to help save lives. That includes a team of seasoned health professionals scanning all available science and evidence as it has grown and evolved in regard to a novel virus. CCHS health officers are a team of health physicians and professionals that work together as well as a number of seasoned public health professionals with years of experience who are reviewing information daily, to ensure our guidance is based on science and importantly, it's up to date. The team of at CCHS have been hard at work ensuring that the information on [cchealth.org](http://cchealth.org) is reliable and based on known science.

It is known that wearing masks, social distancing, a variety of protective measures are really important. It is also known layering this with vaccination, contact tracing, good indoor ventilation and moving as many activities as we can outdoors is the safest possible way forward. It is known that the vaccine remains the best and most powerful tool of protection against Covid-19.

The majority of people who are hospitalized and/or die from Covid-19 in our county are the unvaccinated. Since December 15th the unvaccinated residents have accounted for 95.4% of the county's deaths. September 20<sup>th</sup>, CCHS added a new online dashboard that displays the rate of the daily hospitalizations per 100,000 people due to Covid-19, for both vaccinated and unvaccinated. 80% of all Covid-19 hospitalizations are among the unvaccinated.

Since July 1st, in the 18 to 65 age group, 86% of our hospitalizations have been in that group have been in the unvaccinated. And since July 1st, 86% of the deaths in the 18 to 65 group have been unvaccinated. Unvaccinated people are on average 13 years younger than vaccinated people that are dying. Local hospital data continues to show that getting vaccinated is the most powerful step that we can take and can reduce our risk of acquiring and having a bad outcome from Covid-19.

Erika Jensen, CCHS Deputy Health Director.

Every public health measure known has been implemented in the fight against Covid-19, including education about the science of Covid-19, how it's transmitted, directing people to stay at home through health orders, isolation and quarantine, contact-tracing, travel restrictions, masking and testing. Even with all of those public health measures there have been and still are people very sick and dying, particularly hardest hit being elder adults.

The first vaccine in the western world was introduced in 1796 by Edward Jenner. The smallpox vaccine was distributed in the continental army with General Washington. Smallpox was a deadly disease for thousands of

years, responsible for 300 to 500 million deaths. By using public health measures, we as humans have eliminated smallpox and it no longer causes any disease or deaths anywhere on our planet. This was only because of vaccines.

In March 2020, Ms. Jensen oversaw and coordinated the response to the first outbreak of Covid in a care facility in Orinda. There was no vaccine. It was not possible to prevent multiple deaths in that facility or other care facilities in the county. Even though weekly and on-demand testing were available for both the residents and workers. These were heartbreaking and tragic and incredibly scary times, for residents, for family members, for staff in the facilities, and for the health department staff.

When the vaccine came CCHS offered vaccines to the first responders, law enforcement and firefighters as well as emergency medical personnel and health care professionals before the general public as they recognized the importance of these staff, in character for the County as well as their increased risk given their professions.

The other tool that CCHS has is a vaccine mandate. In the early 1900s, the first mandate was in Boston. They became more widespread in the early 1900s and in 1905 the Supreme Court upheld vaccine mandates to keep up the health of the community. Most people are familiar with the mandated vaccines required to attend school. Many essential workers in the health and education fields are familiar with vaccine requirements that are designed to protect them as well as the public such as hepatitis b, measles and influenza.

In 2016, the California legislature eliminated the ability to exempt children from the vaccine requirements because their family claimed a personal belief exemption. The only way children can go to school in California is either they are advance necessitated or they have an approved medical exemption. This is to protect themselves and everyone else because vaccine mandates save lives.

Listening to the experts about what to do during an emergency is truly a matter of life and death. We know this information they share with us is based on the information they have and based on their expertise and training. Misinformation is dangerous and costs lives.

Chris Farnitano, M.D., Public Health Officer

It is clear now that the delta variant is very deadly and that if the delta variant had arrived before we had vaccines widely available, many, many more people would have died, than have. The delta variant is more contagious and it's more deadly. And the delta variant is quietly circulating in Contra Costa County

When the state blueprint was lifted in June 2021, the state mask requirements were lifted we found that the vaccination level of our community was not high enough to prevent this deadly summer surge of the Delta variant. Though progressing better than many parts of the country, we have not gotten all of our residents vaccinated.

One of the biggest challenges we're facing in stopping this coronavirus is the widespread misinformation about the Covid-19 vaccines. It's permeating our social media feeds, it's permeating our communities and unnecessarily taking lives with it. It is clear that vaccination against Covid-19 is far and away the most effective means of preventing infection with the Covid-19 virus. The vaccines reduce the risk of Covid-19 infection by 70 to 95%. They reduce the risk of hospitalization by over 90%. And they reduce the risk of dying from Covid by over 90%. Additionally the vaccinations also appear to reduce the chance of spreading Covid from a vaccinated person who does unfortunately get infected. They are less likely the spread the infection by 40 to 60% by most estimates. Not only does this vaccine protect the person but other people they may come into contact with.

The mRNA technique that's used in both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines has been studied by hundreds of researchers over decades. It's been studied for developing vaccines for rabies, flu, SARS 1 and other is

diseases. The first animal trial for an mRNA trial was done in the 1990s and the first human clinical trials were started in 2013. here is a lot of scientific experience with these vaccines.

These vaccines do not change a persons DNA and the mRNA in the vaccine leaves the body after a few days. They are very, very safe. There are very rare risks of these vaccines. Those risks are minuscule in comparison to the risk of the Covid virus itself.

The instance of blood clots occurring after the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is estimated to be about seven cases in one million vaccinated women between the ages of 18 and 49 years old. These blood clots are even rarer in older women and even rarer in men. Note three people did die from these blood clots before the use of this vaccine was paused for the CDC to better understand the issue and communicate to doctors how best to treat these blood clots. With those better treatment protocols, any future occurrences of this rare side effect can be prevented and in fact there have been no further confirmed deaths related to the vaccine since the because was lifted. There is no evidence at all that any of the Covid vaccines have contributed to any other Covid deaths from whatever cause. The Covid infection from the virus actually causes many more blood clots in patients than vaccine does.

There were reports of heart problems that are related to the mRNA vaccine called myocarditis. The highest risk seems to be in young males that have been vaccinated with either Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. These cases have been mild and self-effective in a matter of a few days.

About about 20 to 30% of patients hospitalized with Covid show heart problems and the chance of becoming severely ill after Covid infection is much, much higher for all age groups, in fact the hospitalization risk for a young boy or man related to Covid, a quarter of those young men and teenage boys wind up in the ICU and about one in 150 hospitalized young men who are hospitalized with Covid end up dying.

There have been estimated that over 33,000 deaths in children are prevented every single year by just our routine childhood vaccinations that probably all of us have received when we were kids. However, there are still approximately 300 deaths a year in children from these same diseases in children who are either unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated.

Covid-19 is even bigger threat to children's health than all of these other vaccine preventable diseases combined, polio, measles, chicken pox, meningitis, because of the low vaccination rates against Covid in our teens and the lack of an authorized vaccine at this point for children under 12. Our teenagers and our children are at much greater risk for Covid-19 than they are for all these other childhood vaccinations that we just get routinely without too much concern. Since the pandemic began last spring and as of September 15th of this year there have been 516 Covid deaths in children across the United States. That is more than the estimated number of deaths from all these other vaccine preventable diseases in children in the same time period. Even though children are less risk than adults, Covid is still the biggest infectious disease risk in children that exists in this country today.

There are claims that link the Covid vaccine to infertility and pregnancy. There is no information to support that. The American Medical Association recommends vaccination for all young women who are considering a future pregnancy. The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology strongly recommends all pregnant women to receive the vaccine.

There are several drugs that are talked about for treatment or prevention of Covid-19 which have shown to be completely ineffective in treating or preventing Covid-19. That includes hydroxychloroquine, et cetera, i strongly recommend people not use these treatments for either preventing or treating Covid-19.

The other issue is long Covid where people have suffered for months or longer with brain fog, breathing difficulties, fatigue, other symptoms that can go on after someone's recovered from an acute Covid infection.

One survey showed that one in five Covid-19 survivors reported having persistent symptoms, getting Covid, you know even if you survive it, even if you don't get hospitalized, it can still lead to severe symptoms, that can go on for a long period of time.

Comparing Covid to other diseases, in a typical flu year we see about zero to one flu flu deaths a week in Contra Costa County. If you add in all the deaths from pneumonia in Contra Costa County from all causes we might see two or three deaths a week from all causes of pneumonia. We have been seeing 15 to 20 Covid deaths reported a week for the past four weeks. And almost all of those the deaths could have been prevented if those individuals had been vaccinated prior do getting sick.

Sergio Urcuyo, M.D, Family Medicine Specialist

Contra Costa Regional Medical Center (CCRMC) is approaching the end of the fourth wave of Covid infections at the facility. The staff has done a marvelous job of protecting the sick and they are tired. Contra Costa has been in the state of semi-emergency. This last wave has been different in some ways better, in many worse.

It's been different because staff know what to do, know how to diagnose, know how to treat in ways that they didn't when this hit the scene in March of 2020. They are all more exhausted this time around, because the sick patients in the hospital have been unvaccinated. It feels almost universal on the medical wards. They watch patients suffer and die all the while knowing we have a tool that can prevent it. This is a different brand of fatigue than it was for the first few waves and it crushes deeper than the fatigue from a lack of sleep.

Unlike earlier waves, people are now questioning why they make the sacrifices they do. This is new. This is a different sort of fatigue. Different kind of exhaustion that the staff is feeling. CCRMC is often asked to take Covid-19 patient transfers from other counties that are overwhelmed. Particularly in central California where there are no beds left. Our infrastructure has been okay, and one of the reasons it has been okay is because we are one of the fortunate counties. In terms of hospitalizations. And that's in large part thought to be due to our overall high vaccination rate. Yet the transfer system is still impacted now. There are delays in transferring patients for a lack of staffed beds. The lack of staffed beds across the region has left transfers delayed, and left patients in the lurch in ways that they should not be and frankly that they wouldn't be if vaccinations were universally taken by everybody. Vaccines are the key to having staffed beds and that staffed bed is the critical shared resource for the region and for the state. And that's the pivotal piece here in terms of vaccinating our staff members.

Supervisor Andersen noted that with hospitalizations, case numbers have been declining for past three weeks. Contra Costa's demographics are a little bit different than San Francisco or Berkeley. We don't have a major city center universally, so she would like to know why did we go out on our own with implementing vaccine verifications, for restaurants and bars.

San Francisco and Berkeley did put similar restrictions in place for vaccine verification, for restaurants, bars and gyms. As did Los Angeles and Palm Springs. There is not always full consensus across the Bay Area with every one of the 11 counties. But CCHS felt this was really important.

Covid cases are high, the hospitals were really stressed, the school systems were really stressed, too. The schools are struggling to open up in the midst of a surge for full in-person learning. Many children are needing to quarantine and isolate, some classrooms have had to close. So there was an urgency of getting these cases down and get them down quickly to allow kids to stay in school and not have them go back to remote learning like they did last year. And the need to prevent future surges, too. After every holiday there was an increase in cases.

When this order was launched we hadn't seen the effect yet of labor day weekend. There was a slight bump in cases among the unvaccinated population. Fortunately it was a small uptick and hopefully we can start seeing

the numbers decrease again. But the fall and winter holidays are coming up. People will be moving more indoors and we don't want to see another fall or winter wave.

So we need to get the cases down now. We need to help keep them from going up in the near future. We know that these venues are high risk for transmission. There was one study that estimated at one point, 10% of transmission was related to public venues. And we know also that there is a lot of the community that doesn't feel safe going to an indoor restaurant or an indoor gym when there is other people there who may be unvaccinated. We've seen this across the nation that when Covid cases surge, people tend to not go out as much. They tend not to go out to restaurants. Those businesses actually suffer and that's independent of whether there's been a local or state restriction on those businesses. People decide on their own to avoid these high risk businesses. Hopefully by putting these requirements to either show your vaccination or recent negative test, people will feel more confident dining at an indoor restaurant or going to an indoor bar or indoor gym and it may actually drive traffic to those businesses.