CORONAVIRUS UPDATES
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Week of December 27

Special Update
Alameda County Health Care Services Agency

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What we've learned about Omicron.
As of December 21, the 7-day average COVID-19 case rate is **42.3 per 100,000 among unvaccinated** which is twice the rate of **21.0 per 100,000 among fully vaccinated** residents.

These numbers make it clear that we are facing challenges again this winter.
Many residents are protected against the most severe illness from Omicron because they are fully vaccinated and boosted, when eligible. However, very high case numbers could easily cause significant stress to the health care system if even a small percentage of those infected require hospital care. The stress on hospitals across Alameda County might compromise care for people sick with COVID and those who require unexpected care due to an accident, a heart condition, or cancer treatment.

What have we learned about Omicron?
Last week, we learned that immunity from past COVID infection does not effectively prevent Omicron infections. Data from South Africa and the United Kingdom demonstrate that vaccine effectiveness against infection for two doses of an mRNA vaccine is approximately 35%. A COVID-19 vaccine booster dose restores vaccine effectiveness against infection to 75%. COVID-19 vaccination decreases the risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19.

What can we do about Omicron?
We are experiencing increases in COVID cases again this winter, along with flu cases this year. The good news is that we have more tools in our toolkit than we last winter. These life-saving tools – vaccines and boosters, testing, masking, staying home when ill and isolating or quarantining as directed -- can help keep us protected this winter. The most effective tools are vaccines and boosters, and we encourage everyone 5 and older who is not yet vaccinated or boosted (if eligible) to do so with a sense of urgency. Masks are really important too, as they provide a good physical barrier against the virus. It's also important people to **stay home if not feeling well** to be safe rather than sorry.

Community testing sites are experiencing increased demand and implementing strategies to meet demand where possible.

With the combination of inclement weather, the highly transmissible Omicron variant, and holiday gatherings and closures, people seeking testing should expect some delay and longer waits at testing sites. In addition to rapid tests available for sale, the California Department of Public Health works with our Public Health Department, school districts, community-based organizations, and health care providers to offer rapid tests free to the public. If a person can't access a test for any reason and they are symptomatic, they should stay home regardless of their vaccination status. If a person is exposed and unvaccinated or not boosted, they should also stay home.

Mask up!
This week, Alameda County and the City of Berkeley rescinded their face masking amendments that permitted fully vaccinated people to go without masks in certain limited indoor settings. Effective December 30, **everyone will be required to mask in all indoor public settings, regardless of their vaccination status.** This does not impact school settings.

What about isolation and quarantine?
Isolation occurs when a person is sick or tests positive for an infection, even if they don't have symptoms. Quarantine occurs when a person might have been exposed to the virus and may or may not have been infected. This week, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) shortened the recommended time for isolation and quarantine for COVID-19. We are reviewing the recommendations and await formal guidance from the California Department of Public health. We will update local guidelines to best meet the needs of our residents. Most importantly, those who are sick should continue to stay home.

As a reminder:
- Residents can walk-in to any Alameda County supported vaccination site or make an appointment at the hundreds of sites across the county to get vaccinated. Find a vaccine on our website.
- There are free testing sites throughout the county and individuals can go to our website to find out information about where to get tested. Residents must also isolate if they are symptomatic or receive a positive COVID test result and quarantine if they are not boosted or unvaccinated and had close contact.
- All residents across Alameda County should follow masking protocols and wear a mask when indoors regardless of vaccination status. Individuals should also consider wearing a mask at any crowded outdoor events.

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Resources to Complete At Home Tests

- Easy guide to completing your at-home COVID test: English
- Easy guide to completing your at-home COVID test: Spanish