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Contra Costa County updates COVID-19 guidelines

By Sora O'Doherty

County government works as a conduit, adapting developments from the federal and state governments and passing along information, rules and guidelines to local governments, including the cities of Lafayette and Orinda and the town of Moraga. In addition, the county provides services to residents, including centers for COVID-19 vaccinations, testing, and distribution of home test kits and other supplies. Lamorinda is within county supervisorial District 2, represented by supervisor Candace Andersen. Updates on COVID are processed almost daily by the county.

As of Jan. 13, for example, the county published updated information for schools and childcare facilities.

County health pointed out that, despite the concerns about children being in the classroom during a pandemic, the risk at school is actually lower than the risk outside of school.

Updated guidelines from the state set forth the requirements for isolation and quarantine for K-12 settings.

This is a subject that has caused considerable confusion, as was demonstrated by the national media at a Jan. 7 press conference held by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

California currently permits children to return to school after they first test positive for COVID-19 if a subsequent test taken on or after day five of isolation is negative and the child doesn't have symptoms or symptoms are improving. An over-the-counter home antigen test can be used to end isolation. In addition, the state recently updated its guidance for students exposed to COVID-19 in a K-12 setting, with updates to individual-level quarantine recommendations and an additional group-tracing approach strategy. All updates can be found on the CA Safe Schools Hub and in the CDPH K-12 School Guidance.

There is different guidance for the general public. Regardless of vaccination status, previous infection or lack of symptoms, everyone who tests positive for COVID-19 is advised to stay home for at least five days.

Isolation can end after five days when symptoms are not present or are resolving and there is a negative test, preferably an antigen test. Without a test, isolation can end after day 10, unless there is fever or other symptoms. Upon returning from isolation, individuals are advised to wear a well-fitting mask around other people, especially in indoor settings. Quarantines are recommended for persons who are either unvaccinated or have not yet received a booster dose of vaccine. Where there is no quarantine, individuals are recommended to test on day five after exposure to a person with COVID-19. If the test is positive, it is recommended that that person follow the isolation recommendations.

However, these guidelines do not apply to healthcare or emergency medical services personnel until February. These workers were temporarily exempted from the guidelines by California Gov. Gavin Newsom in an attempt to address the shortage of healthcare workers, a move that was met with disapprobation by some healthcare workers, according to local media reports. Until Feb. 1 healthcare workers who have tested positive for COVID may return to work immediately, but must wear N95 respirator masks.

The county has also been distributing at-home testing kits to the public on a first come, first served basis when kits are available from the federal government. On Jan. 14 the county also made available a number of N95 masks that were past their expiration date but still considered usable. The county continues to encourage people to have tests at the many testing facilities run by the state and county, and of course to get vaccinated and boosted if eligible.

The first case of the Omicron variant in Contra Costa County was identified on Dec. 18, and since then case rates and hospitalizations increased significantly. The average number of daily new COVID-19 cases in late December had increased 149% over the prior week and hospitalizations had risen 31%. In response, the county reimposed a masking requirement for almost all indoor settings, with an exception for performers at indoor live or recorded settings or events such as music concerts or theatrical plays.

In order to rescind the masking requirement, the county must be in the moderate or yellow tier for at least three consecutive weeks and there must be fewer than 75 COVID hospitalizations in the county. Currently the county remains in the red tier and has over 200 hospitalizations. The county has met the requirement of being more than eight weeks after vaccines were authorized for children aged 5-11, and is very close to meeting the goal of 80% fully vaccinated. Currently, the number stands at 79%. All the criteria must be met before the county can change the requirement for masking in indoor spaces.

As of Jan. 13 Contra Costa County remained in the red tier, indicating that COVID transmission was at high risk. New daily case rates were up by nearly 75% and hospitalizations were up 84% over the previous week. Both numbers showed an increasing trend. New cases were much higher among those who were unvaccinated, although cases among the vaccinated were also occurring at a lower rate. The lowest rate of cases were among those who were fully vaccinated and boosted. The county has experienced 1,083 deaths from COVID-19, with 91% of deaths occurring among the unvaccinated since vaccines became available on Dec. 15, 2020. Although not the lowest rates in the county, Lamorinda was relatively low in comparison with other localities, with new cases in the past 14 days recorded as 430 for Lafayette, 280 in Moraga, and 386 in Orinda. These numbers still represent a significant jump from last year when numbers of positive cases in each city were in single or double digits only. The number of deaths from COVID in Lamorinda also remains low, with six deaths each for Lafayette and Moraga and 16 deaths total for Orinda.

Links:

<https://cchealth.org>

<https://www.coronavirus.cchealth.org/overview>

<https://www.coronavirus.cchealth.org/get-vaccinated>

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/t0107-covid-update.html>

<https://www.covidtests.gov/>

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