

County of Santa Clara

Public Health Department



Health Officer
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November 20, 2020

To: All Healthcare Workers and Individuals Working in Congregate Settings (e.g. Jails; Shelters; Healthcare Facilities; and Other Facilities Serving Vulnerable Populations)

RE: Protecting Your Health as COVID-19 Cases Spike in Santa Clara County

Our county entered the purple (most restrictive) tier this week, indicating that COVID-19 is again very widespread in our community; in fact, it is more widespread now than at any other time during this pandemic. Both the number of cases and hospitalizations have increased sharply over the last two weeks and show no signs of slowing. You probably know people who have had COVID-19, and you may be concerned about getting COVID-19 yourself and bringing it home to your family or friends.

This letter shares some **ways to stay safer at work and at home**. Your health matters. Without you, important facilities like hospitals, long-term care facilities, jails, and shelters cannot safely operate. As we have experienced many times during this pandemic, outbreaks of COVID-19 spread rapidly within congregate settings. Now more than ever, your community is counting on you to stay healthy and practice COVID-19 safety precautions both at work and outside of work.

Here are my best recommendations to protect yourself and the people you serve at work:

1. **Stay home for the holidays. I strongly urge you to cancel any travel plans you may have right away.** Traveling puts you at higher risk of getting COVID-19. Your travel also puts your family, co-workers, and people you serve at risk, and may put your facility at risk of staffing shortages. Travel is risky because it is difficult to maintain distance from others outside of your household, and you are likely to come into contact with many people. Many people get COVID-19 from traveling. If you absolutely must travel between now and early next year, I strongly recommend that you self-quarantine at home for 14 days after return, especially if you were indoors with people you don't live with, like visiting a relative in their home. Watch yourself for symptoms for 14 days and get tested around 3–6 days after returning.
2. **Gather safely and avoid being indoors with people you don't live with.** During the holiday season, you may be wondering if it is safe to celebrate with loved ones. Any activity with people who do not live in your house or apartment increases your risk of catching the virus. (This includes eating with coworkers in a breakroom, which must be avoided.) Eating indoors with anyone you don't live with is a high-risk activity because you have to remove your protective face covering to eat. Many people get COVID-19 from friends, relatives, and coworkers. The safest way to meet is virtually. If you must meet in person, keep it short (less

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than 2 hours), meet outside, sit more than 6 feet apart, keep your face covering on, and do not gather with more than two other households. Unsafe gatherings, especially when indoors without good ventilation (e.g. open windows), distancing, and masking, may also put your facility at risk of staffing shortages.

3. **Get tested for COVID-19 regularly, and if you experience any symptoms of COVID-19, get tested right away—don't wait.** People look up to you. Set the right example by getting tested regularly. It protects the people you see at work and at home. If you test positive, there are programs to help you with rent and food while you isolate and recover. Testing is free and painless. Your employer may provide testing. Or, if you have health insurance, your regular doctor is required to test you. For anyone who does not have health insurance, or anyone who finds it more convenient, the County of Santa Clara offers many locations for free testing. Schedule a test at www.sccfreetest.org.

If you have questions or need resources, calling 2-1-1 is a great place to start. They can route you to the right support. You can also visit www.sccphd.org/coronavirus. Keeping you healthy is important. Supporting you if you become sick is important too. The County of Santa Clara has resources available to you.

Thank you for your service to our community, and I wish you a safe and healthy holiday season.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara H. Cody". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sara" being the most prominent.

Sara H. Cody, MD
Health Officer