



Contra Costa Co.: County Officials Developing Order To Require More Covid-19 Testing

Bay City News Service Published 3:37 pm PDT, Thursday, September 17, 2020

By Sam Richards

Bay City News Foundation

Saying some health providers are not providing their share of COVID-19 tests, Contra Costa County's health officer and one county supervisor said a health order mandating more testing by providers is in order, and in the works.

County Health Officer Dr. Chris Farnitano mentioned it during a presentation to the Board of Supervisors centering on the need for more COVID-19 testing to help slow the spread of the virus.

He said Contra Costa health officials have been working with health care providers on this, but said a health order is needed to require both more testing and protocol changes adjusting testing limits and eliminating requirements for doctors' referrals.

Farnitano said about half of Contra Costa residents with health plans are Kaiser members, but that Kaiser has performed, as of Tuesday, 18 percent of COVID-19 tests in the county since the pandemic began in March.

"We're doing the large bulk of the (COVID-19) testing in the county, and we really need our community providers to step up and do more," Farnitano said.

County Supervisor John Gioia echoed that sentiment. He relayed the travails of San Pablo City Councilman Abel Pineda, who lives with his COVID-19-positive parents. Gioia said that, at least for a while, Pineda couldn't get a test scheduled for himself with Kaiser, even though he's a Kaiser member.

"If working together (with the care providers) isn't going to achieve the outcome of greater testing, then we need to order them to change their protocol," Gioia said Tuesday.

Contra Costa Health Services spokesman Karl Fischer said Wednesday that, "We are exploring the possibility of future health orders but do not yet have firm details."

In Santa Clara County, Public Health Officer Dr. Sara Cody on Wednesday issued a revised testing order requiring health care providers to make novel coronavirus testing easier and more efficient to obtain.

Health care companies and nonprofits such as Kaiser Permanente, HCA Healthcare and Sutter Palo Alto Medical Foundation will now have to provide coronavirus testing to more categories of patients and take less time to report results of those tests.

Kaiser spokeswoman Kerri Leedy said Wednesday that Kaiser is in compliance with state orders on testing in California, and is following the direction of the state Department of Public Health and the state Department of Managed Health Care on COVID-19 testing.

If Kaiser for any reason can't provide a needed COVID-19 test, she said, members can be tested at a private lab or an "external licensed, independent facility" such as a private lab, CVS, Walgreens or Walmart, and Kaiser will reimburse members for allowable costs of the test.

Kaiser, Leedy said, recently opened a new testing lab in Berkeley should allow for a doubling of the health care provider's testing capacity by the end of September, and up to 15,000 tests a day by November.

"Everyone, including Kaiser Permanente, agrees more testing needs to be done throughout our communities to address the pandemic, and we are committed to making testing timely and accessible for our members," Leedy said.

Ben Drew, spokesman for Walnut Creek-based John Muir Health, said this week that JMH understands the need for increased COVID-19 testing and supports Contra Costa Health Services' request for more testing, especially as flu season approaches.

John Muir Health does COVID-19 testing at several of its locations in the East Bay in Contra Costa and Alameda counties, Drew said, and many locations have same-day testing appointments available.

Copyright © 2020 by Bay City News, Inc. Republication, Rebroadcast or any other Reuse without the express written consent of Bay City News, Inc. is prohibited.