

Contra Costa County Health Officials Say COVID-19 Numbers Declining

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STAMFORD, CT – MARCH 23: Health workers dressed in personal protective equipment (PPE) handle a coronavirus test at a drive-thru testing station at Cummings Park on March 23, 2020 in Stamford, Connecticut. Availability of protective clothing for medical workers has become a major issue as COVID-19 cases surge throughout the United States. The Stamford site is run by Murphy Medical Associates.

Contra Costa County's COVID-19 case numbers are headed in the right direction, health officials told the county's Board of Supervisors Tuesday. But there's still plenty of work ahead.

"Our daily case rate is starting to fall," said county health director Anna Roth. "This is a trend we're starting to see in Contra Costa County. We do feel we're on the backside of the winter wave. The number of cases per day, per 100,000 residents, in mid-January was about 62. And it's now around 30. We're very relieved to see those numbers moving in that direction."

Countywide hospitalizations are trending the same direction. "Our high point was at 296 people in the hospital," Roth said. "And today we have about 172. Sadly, we've also lost

more than 529 people in this county to this virus, and it's taken a very heavy toll on our community."

Roth said the county's vaccine rollout is moving along successfully but is an area where her department needs more information from the state, as vaccine supply isn't keeping up with demand all over the world.

"We've made a commitment to delivering 1 million doses by July 4, and we're well on our way," Roth said. "We've now delivered 127,576 doses here in our county. Those were mostly to health care workers as well as to seniors, specifically 75 and older."

Roth said, by the end of January, her department made appointments for everyone in its database ages 75 and over, representing about half the county's population in that age category.

"That means if you're 75 and over and you registered on our website for an appointment, you should've gotten an email from us ... so now is the time to check your email, check your spam or junk folders, if you didn't get that email, call us ... we want to hear from you."

Supervisor John Gioia said he still wants to see higher vaccination rates in communities hit hardest by the virus: those of color and lower-income.

"Richmond has 8 percent of its population over 70; Danville has 13 percent of its population over 70, but Danville has had three times (the vaccination rate), almost three, compared to some communities' rate of vaccination," Gioia said. "I just wanted to put it in perspective that my earlier comment that the age difference, while it's there, is not like triple."

Supervisor Candace Andersen, who represents Danville, San Ramon and the Lamorinda area, said the disparity could be attributed to more high-priority medical professionals and greater access to technology in her district.

"I think we're at such an early phase, to make drastic comparisons isn't really helpful," Andersen said. "We should do more in disadvantaged communities, and we're all committed to doing that."

The health department's Chief Equity Officer Gilbert Salinas said reaching "marginalized communities" may take longer because of trust issues. "We really have to do a better job of reaching out and establishing that trust," Salinas said. "This is a very high priority."

Salinas also talked about the department's new Help Your Neighbor program. "A lot of our older population needs help to navigate the online forums and get appointments," he said. "We really encourage all of you to reach out to people in your neighborhood, your church, you might be able to help."

More information can be found at www.CCHealth.org, where county residents can also register for appointments. They can also call the vaccination help center at (833) 829-2626 and either wait to talk to a staff member or leave a message for a return call.

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