



# Contra Costa County supervisors want to up vaccination rates in low-income, communities of color

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**MARTINEZ, Calif.** - Contra Costa County supervisors said this week that they want to increase the COVID-19 vaccination rates in the communities hit hardest by the virus, mostly lower-income areas and communities of color.

Most vocal among those supervisors was John Gioia of El Cerrito, who, at a Board of Supervisors retreat, told county health services officials he hopes to see a plan to increase outreach, and subsequently vaccinations, in communities where the

percentage of residents who have had the first of two needed COVID-19 vaccines is lower than in some areas of the county that are more affluent.

Gioia noted that communities including Antioch, Richmond and Bay Point have COVID-19 immunization rates from 4.3 to 5.1 percent.

Other communities, including Alamo, Danville, Lafayette, Diablo and Walnut Creek, show vaccination rates of from 11 to 13.8 percent of residents.

"They're communities that are white, and more middle- to upper-class, compared to communities of color and of lower (economic) class that have half the rate of dosage," Gioia said.

County Health Director Anna Roth and Health Officer Dr. Chris Farnitano said part of that is likely a reflection of where members in the highest-priority groups for getting vaccinations, such as the elderly, residents of congregant care homes and health care workers, live.

Gioia said he recognized and understood that, but also said many communities in East and West County have been the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, and that ways must be found to reach them.

He said doing that would be "translating our commitment to equity into reality."

Roth said Gioia's concerns were justified, and that her department's employees are asking these questions themselves, despite considerable efforts at outreach and publicity.

"We have to be deliberate to make sure that these inequities don't persist," Roth said.

Farnitano said the county is ramping up efforts not only to expand the number of county-operated clinics and other facilities throughout Contra Costa County where vaccinations are available, but partnering with clinics operated by "community partners," school districts, the county housing authority, faith communities, farmworker groups and other community organizations to set up more vaccination centers.

Gioia said he also wanted to help make sure teachers are able to get vaccinations as soon as possible, to help allow schools to reopen sooner.

In December, the Board of Supervisors formally asked the state to prioritize teachers for vaccines.

"What we don't want is our county being blamed for schools not opening when we've reached the point they're ready to open," he said.

Despite the concerns aired this week, supervisors said they understand the huge learning curve county health officials have in dealing with the pandemic while remaining nimble. "We've really been living in an environment that's been changing constantly, sometimes hour by hour," Roth said.

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