

COVID Updates to the Placer County Board of Supervisors (7/27/21)

July 27, 2021- The Delta Variant is posing challenges across the county, including here in Placer County, where it now appears to be the predominant strain of COVID. The biggest problem with the delta variant is that it is much more contagious than the original strains of COVID. Recent studies indicate that people infected with the delta variant are shedding over 1000 times more virus particles than people infected with earlier strains of COVID did. And it also appears that the delta variant has a shorter incubation period, or time from when a person is first exposed until they get infected and begin to shed the virus. So these factors, along with loosening of restrictions, seem to be contributing to higher rates of spread. As of yesterday, our case rate here in Placer is **10.3 cases per 100k (now 10.8)**, and our testing positivity rate is **5.1% (now 5.5%)**. These numbers have roughly tripled in the last month. If we were still under the color-coded tier system in the Blueprint for a Healthier Economy, Placer and most other counties in our region would now be in the Purple tier.

By the way, much of the data I am presenting today is available on our Placer County COVID dashboard. In response to increased community transmission, we are increasing the frequency of dashboard updates up to 2 times per week. We are planning on now updating the dashboard on Tuesdays and Thursdays, starting today.

Currently there are more than **60 patients (now 66)** hospitalized in Placer hospitals due to COVID, with at least **15 cases (now 17)** in our ICUs. This represents roughly a doubling of hospitalizations in the last month, and is approaching the peak of hospitalizations we saw last summer. Yet these numbers are still much lower than the peak in hospitalizations we saw with the winter surge. We still seem to have plenty of critical care beds right now, but hospital staffing continues to be a challenge. We would like to once again express our sincere appreciation to our HCWs, who have been on the front lines heroically taking care of patients with COVID for almost 18 months now.

We recently passed the somber milestone of over 300 Placer residents dead from COVID. But our rate of deaths from COVID has slowed dramatically in recent months, with COVID deaths recently seeming to remain relatively rare, despite the recent surge in cases and hospitalizations. One of our hospital systems has begun reporting the vaccination status of their hospitalized patients to us, and they report that as of Monday, just 1 of their 29 COVID patients is fully vaccinated. While deaths can lag behind hospitalizations by a few weeks, we are hopeful that there will be less deaths associated with this surge as compared to previous surges, **as more than 200,000 Placer residents, the majority of all our residents, have now been fully vaccinated.** And more than 80% of all of our seniors have been vaccinated.

With the majority of Placer residents now fully vaccinated, and nearly 4 billion COVID vaccines administered worldwide, these vaccines are proving to be some of the safest and most effective vaccines in history. And they are particularly effective at preventing severe illness and death. Over 99% of all COVID deaths and 97% of all hospitalizations due to COVID are now among people who were not vaccinated. The vaccines are somewhat less effective at preventing mild infections, especially in the immunocompromised, and that is why the CDC now recommends that immunocompromised individuals behave as if they are still unvaccinated (distancing, wearing masks, and avoiding crowds). But still, the rates of infection among vaccinated people are a fraction of what they are among the unvaccinated. The state reports that the case rate for the week of July 7-14 among unvaccinated Californians is 13 per 100,000 per day, and among vaccinated Californians is much lower, at 2 per 100,000 per day.

Given increases in rates of spread recently, it is reasonable for even some vaccinated people (especially those who are the most vulnerable to COVID complications) to consider taking additional precautions, such as avoiding large indoor crowds or wearing a mask while indoors and around large numbers of people with unknown vaccination status. Some counties are recommending or mandating universal indoor masking. Placer continues to align with guidance from the California Department of Public Health and the CDC which recommend indoor masking for unvaccinated people. (Update- CDC and CDPH are now recommending universal masking, regardless of vaccination status, in public indoor spaces: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/guidance-for-face-coverings.aspx>)

However, in an effort to have full-day, in-person instruction for all students, the state IS mandating universal indoor masking in schools, with school districts given some flexibility on how to enforce this. The State has eased up on physical distancing and quarantine restrictions for schools **and has prioritized masking**, given the effectiveness of this intervention at limiting the spread of COVID among students, including those who are not yet able to receive a vaccine. Placer was one of only a few counties statewide that was able to largely return to in-person learning models for the bulk of the last school year, with safety precautions in place. The previous quarantine and distancing requirements posed significant operational challenges to our schools, so with these changes we are hopeful that, even in the face of rising cases, that we will be able to continue to work with our school partners to maximize in-person learning while prioritizing safety this coming year.

Testing is another key tool in our toolbelt to combat the COVID trends we're seeing. Recently, the state had moved to scale back our Optum Serve sites, given their low rates of use. The state intended to shift these testing sites from 5 days to 2 days a week, but I am happy to report that it seems that we have successfully made the case that we must retain this crucial resource as testing demand grows. Placer County's Optum Serve sites in Roseville and Truckee have been critical to helping us insure that all residents have access to free testing. We strongly encourage anyone with symptoms – regardless of vaccination status – to get tested.

As the Delta variant spreads rapidly among unvaccinated people in our community and threatens some of our most vulnerable residents... as we are just getting back to some semblance of normal business operations... and as schools prepare to re-open again with full-time in-person instruction that our kids so desperately need, I would like to take this opportunity to once again urge our residents who are not yet vaccinated to please get vaccinated now.

There are lots of reasons why some people haven't been vaccinated yet. But one of those reasons should no longer be access to vaccination opportunities. We now have dozens of vaccine providers conveniently located throughout the county and there are regular community-based clinics to help make these free vaccinations more accessible. We now have plenty of all 3 vaccines. The state's contract with the SnapNurse mobile effort has now been extended through September. If you have trouble finding a place to get vaccinated, please go to our website or call 211.

Another common reason we hear for not getting vaccinated is that a particular individual or family didn't get sick with earlier COVID surges, and so some people reason they and their loved ones will probably still remain healthy with this surge. Again, we are seeing that the delta variant is much easier to catch than previous COVID variants. So, just because you didn't get COVID before, doesn't mean that you won't catch the delta variant.

We know and respect the fact that some people have questions about the different vaccines, and everyone deserves to have their questions answered. But answers from reputable sources ARE available, and it is critical that people with questions talk with their doctor and get their questions answered as soon as possible. The time to make a choice is now. If you aren't vaccinated, you aren't protected. And you aren't protecting your family or our community.

We are seeing that even in the absence of restrictions, widespread disease creates big challenges for all of us. For instance, due to this surge, some people may choose not to eat out or may avoid a shopping trip at a local business, just at the time that our businesses need them the most. Or they may elect for their kids to learn at home instead of at school, even though we know how important in-person education and social connection can be for child development. And we have seen how COVID outbreaks can bring business and school operations to a halt. We still have the opportunity to avoid further preventable illness and suffering and to avoid further disruption to our economy and schools. We have the opportunity to finally turn the page on COVID. But we need to act now.