



City Manager's

# COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE

December 2020

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# COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

*City Manager Dee Williams-Ridley provided this update on the City of Berkeley's COVID-19 response to the City Council. The reports, which are issued at least weekly, can be viewed at [cityofberkeley.info/covid19-city-manager-updates](http://cityofberkeley.info/covid19-city-manager-updates).*

## **Off-site housing, restrictions imposed to protect Golden Gate Fields workers**

Berkeley Public Health, in close collaboration with the City Attorney's Office, worked to have all Golden Gate Fields employees still susceptible to COVID-19 to be moved to off-site housing that allows them to safely quarantine for the full 14 days -- the period during which someone may become infectious after an exposure.

This relocation, which was completed on Monday, comes after a second round of comprehensive testing directed by Berkeley Public Health identified another 100 cases and brings the total number of cases at the racetrack to more than 300 over the past month. As soon as the results came in, Berkeley Public Health required the track to quarantine staff off-site.

All staff who have tested positive had already been isolated off-site and, now, due to new evidence of ongoing transmission, all contacts who have been exposed are also quarantining off-site.

Roughly 71 staff, deemed essential to maintain the health of the horses, will be allowed to work -- but only under strict protocols about which locations they can access and also requiring protective equipment, such as fit-tested N95 respirators and eye protection. They will be limited to working on site to no more than 4 hours a day and they'll be completely excluded from the "backside" or "backstretch," the area where many normally live in dorm-like shared housing. The track and the 60-plus employers who use the facility and hire workers will all be required to test these still-susceptible employees at least twice a week, as required by Cal/OSHA.

Our goal is to ensure that these members of our community are protected by implementing effective measures to ensure a safer workspace for all.

These measures are in addition to a number of steps Berkeley Public Health has taken to quickly respond to cases that have emerged at Golden Gate Fields. The track generates sales tax revenue in Albany but the "backstretch" workers live in Berkeley.



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Immediately upon early evidence of ongoing transmission, Berkeley Public Health directed universal testing of all employees. This early step led to the identification of more than 200 cases, a reflection of the tight, shared housing environment for these on-site employees.

A number of measures were imposed to limit spread, including the placement of portable bathrooms and hand-washing stations to allow those in quarantine to remain separate. We moved to require off-site housing for quarantine once testing proved that on-site quarantine and mitigation measures were not sufficient.

Our work has, from the beginning, involved close collaboration with state agencies to ensure that the care of these employees is looked at from multiple perspectives and with the most robust scientific knowledge in all applicable fields. Our work with the California Department of Public Health meant that the state has provided all of the testing for the track, which is required to do this testing in accordance with Cal/OSHA requirements. Our coordination with the state also allowed us to extensively use state workers for contact investigation and tracing and the state has also assigned several staff to assist us with the epidemiological investigation. We have also worked with the California Department of Food and Agriculture, to determine what type of animal care was critical and what roles were needed.

The dedicated work of our Public Health team cannot be overstated. It has stretched late into many nights, and has included many weekends. Our focus on this facility will continue for many weeks to come as we seek to protect all who work there.

## **Emergency Stay Home Order**

There were 1,556 ICU beds available statewide on Monday, nearly half of the 3,079 beds available on Oct. 19. This terrifying plunge in available ICU beds over 7 weeks is at the heart of why the state announced its regional stay-at-home order on Thursday and why our health officer and five others in the Bay Area adopted that framework a day later.

A statewide surge means that when hospitals are full, there will be nowhere else to send patients. More than ever, we need each community member to take action.

We outlined the steps everyone needs to take in a clear, accessible [community message](#) on Saturday along with the order and an outline of what's open and closed.



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## **Playgrounds and courts to open, with grocery stores expanding capacity**

We will be aligning our order with the state to address new state guidance issued Wednesday.

- Grocery stores can operate at up to 35% of capacity (instead of 20%)
- Playgrounds to remain open

The order also clarifies that other outdoor recreation facilities such as playing fields and basketball, volleyball, tennis, and pickleball courts can remain open so long as there is not mixing between members of different households.

We need everyone to stay home as much as possible. These changes allow people to go outdoors but remain with their own household.

## **As vaccine emerges, long road ahead**

The State of California is expecting to receive as much as 327,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine as early as mid-December, with another round of supply to come a few weeks later. In Berkeley, we are anticipating receiving 975 doses before the end of the year.

The City, like other jurisdictions around the region, will follow State and CDC guidelines for distribution.

In California, the first phase of [vaccine distribution program](#) prioritizes health care workers in healthcare facilities at the highest risk of infection.

Subsequent phases will prioritize populations at highest risk of developing severe complications for COVID-19, other at-risk populations, essential workers in critical industries, and eventually to the general public. It will be a while before the vaccine reaches everyone. It will be critical to maintain our essential daily habits not only for the long-term, but it is especially critical as we experience a statewide, unprecedented surge in this easily spreading, dangerous virus.

It is essential that we keep physical distance, wearing a face covering, avoiding gatherings outside of the household, quarantining when necessary and stay home as much as possible.



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## **Vaccinations begin, offering a beacon of hope in a grim time**

Seeing vaccinations being given amidst our most terrifying moment of the pandemic has given hope. We now have a critical tool to fight the pandemic.

But it's not a panacea.

The CDC has outlined [10 key steps to fight the pandemic](#). That includes public health work to protect high-risk groups and health care workers, identifying and isolating cases, and also tracing and quarantining contacts. For the public that means wearing face coverings, washing hands, avoiding gatherings, postponing travel, and staying home whenever possible.

A widely distributed vaccine is the final piece.

The development and distribution of a rigorously tested, effective vaccine just one year after this virus first emerged is a testament to science, our guide throughout this pandemic. Yet, it will take many months for even this first stage to be complete. The general public may get the vaccine by early summer.

All of the Region's Health Officers will be following [the state's vaccine distribution guidelines](#), which now prioritize healthcare workers in acute care facilities.

Our [community message](#) outlines many of the key issues and the shared vision of the region's Health Officers and the state.

## **Avoiding holiday celebrations**

The most serious, current threat to our community are the actions we ourselves take during the holidays. Gatherings for Christmas, Kwanzaa, Día de los Reyes, Hanukkah or for the end of the year threaten to add fuel to an unprecedented surge -- just as we begin to see the impact of Thanksgiving gatherings upon our current surge.

The struggle is real. People feel emotional, cultural and other reasons to gather. To help, we distributed a community message that helps explain the threat that



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gatherings pose -- but also provides some tools for how they can gather in alternative ways.

We're asking people to gather online. We've also given people some tools to work through difficult conversations with family.

See [our community message](#), which aligns with the state's encouragement for families to have "[The COVID-chat](#)" to encourage safety.

## **People who travel outside the region should quarantine on return**

State and local Health Officials have urged Californians to avoid holiday travel. While many residents are heeding these warnings and canceling plans, we know that many others are not.

Those who choose to travel during the holidays should quarantine at home for 14 days after their return. Travel outside the region, especially by plane, bus, train, or other shared transportation, increases chances of contracting COVID-19 and spreading it to others. Quarantine stops the spread.

Information on when and how to quarantine, along with links to our Quarantine Health Order and home quarantine instructions from Berkeley Public Health, is available at [cityofberkeley.info/quarantine](http://cityofberkeley.info/quarantine).

## **Regional Stay at Home Order**

ICU capacity across the Bay Area is now under 13%, which places the entire region under state restrictions that were already in place in Berkeley.

Berkeley, along with five Bay Area counties, enacted these rules as local orders in early December to slow down the surge. The mandated restrictions now cover 11 Bay Area counties and will remain in place until at least January 7. Over 98 percent of Californians are now affected by the state order.

ICU capacity is one of the final impacts of a cascading set of events set in motion by this virus. This surge does not yet reflect the full impact of Thanksgiving travel and gatherings. It can take two weeks for the virus to be detectable by a test or for symptoms to emerge after an exposure. Hospitalizations typically follow two to three weeks later.



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If available ICU beds remain below 15 percent capacity, the orders will remain in place beyond January 7 and will be reviewed by the state on a weekly basis.

We sent a [message to community members](#) this week stressing the extreme level of threat and urging them to stay home and avoid gatherings.

## **Housing for the homeless: County seeking property owners with available units**

Alameda County is asking property owners with available units to consider leasing them through a program that helps house and transition homeless residents in our community. This program takes on added significance during the pandemic, as we attempt to move our most vulnerable residents to safe housing.

Tenants matched for this program pay a percentage of their income, and the balance of the rent is supported with government and philanthropic funding. Wrap-around services and a case manager support tenants after move-in to ensure a successful transition.

Landlords participating in the program are guaranteed on-time monthly payment and provided a single point of contact and 24-hour phone support to help with any potential tenant issues. Property owners can set criteria for the tenants to be matched with, and may require a standard rental application.

Apartments of any size are welcome, but the highest demand is for studios and 1-bedrooms. Units with easy access to public transportation, their own bathroom, and a kitchen or kitchenette are preferred.

To learn more, property owners should call (510) 777-2100 or email [ACHomes@acgov.org](mailto:ACHomes@acgov.org). Housing specialists are available to answer questions. A flyer with program information is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Please share [this important message](#) with your networks. Every day there are thousands of individuals and families in the Bay Area looking for a chance to call a place home. Alameda County hopes to identify 300 housing units by the end of 2020.



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## Stay local by buying local

The City of Berkeley's #DiscoveredinBerkeley campaign continues to showcase unique and exemplary local businesses.

Today's [article in Berkeleyside](#) highlights how Berkeley curators and crafters bring holiday cheer to a community sheltered at home.

The story also reminds readers of the importance of safe local shopping (through the [#BerkeleyHolidays Gift Guide](#) or otherwise) and reminds readers that arts businesses have until Jan.19 to apply for a [City of Berkeley Civic Arts grant](#).

More information can be found at [www.discoveredinberkeley.com](http://www.discoveredinberkeley.com).

Buying local allows us to stay safe while supporting our community.

## Testing

Our two City-coordinated sites provided 3,424 COVID-19 tests over the past week.

**Curative** averaged 323 tests per day, half of which were on Berkeley residents.

**Optum**, where we have recently doubled testing capacity, average 291 tests per day. 46% were on Berkeley residents.

## Support for the unhoused

The four units at our house on Fifth Street are fully occupied. In addition, 11 of the 18 trailers we established are occupied by 14 people. Both of the County-run hotels continue to be used extensively, and most are Berkeley residents -- a reflection of our outreach work. 62 of 69 rooms are currently occupied by a total of 73 people.

## Shower Program

We continue to see active use of our expanded shower program. Last week, Willard saw an average of 25 people per day. Of those, 87 percent were men and 13 percent were women. West Campus served an average of 24 people per day. Of those, 96 percent were men and 4 percent were women.



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## Physical Signage and Outreach Library

The EOC will be distributing another 500 "**Do Your Part**" signs will be placed around Berkeley parks and common areas over the coming weeks and months to add signage in certain locations, or replace signs in parks that are missing.

These signs, which are in English and Spanish, convey our three most important public messages: wearing a face covering, keeping 6 feet apart from others, and avoiding gatherings.

Over the last couple of weeks, 137 **Mask On to Move On** street pole banners were installed at three major Berkeley thoroughfares.

These banners feature four images, and are located on:

- University from San Pablo to Sacramento
- San Pablo from Cedar to Dwight
- Telegraph Avenue from Ashby to Derby

Images for each of these campaigns -- as well as many more -- are available on the City's [online outreach library](#).