



HEALTH ALERT

Date: March 9, 2020

To: Residents of San Benito County

From: Martin Fenstersheib, MD, MPH, Interim Health Officer

Subject: **SAN BENITO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES ANNOUNCES AGGRESSIVE RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**

Purpose of this document: San Benito County Public Health Services is taking additional steps to protect the community from novel coronavirus (COVID-19). These recommendations are meant to reduce the potential exposure to the virus and specifically protect those who are the most vulnerable to severe disease.

As we know, this is an ever-changing event in our lives. The response must now include measures that will most likely alter some of our daily routines. Our community is unique in that many residents who live here travel outside the county, especially to Santa Clara County where there have been numerous cases of novel coronavirus with evidence of community spread. We are adopting similar guidelines to Santa Clara County at this time

New Public Health Guidance

Those at Highest Risk are:

- Persons 60 years old and older. The risk increases significantly as people age. Those elderly persons have experienced the most severe forms of the disease.
- People, regardless of age, with underlying health conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, heart disease chronic lung diseases like COPD, as well as those with severely weakened immune systems.

We recommend at-risk individuals avoid crowds and group events. Avoid being around others who are sick. Consider not traveling through crowded airports and postpone vacations on cruise ships.

1) **If you are sick**

- Stay home and away from others in your household until your symptoms subside.
- Do not go out in public.
- Avoid medical settings in general unless necessary.
- If you are ill and feel you need medical attention, call a health care provider first and discuss your symptoms.

2) **Workplace and Businesses: Minimize Exposure**

- Suspend nonessential employee travel.
- Minimize the number of employees working within arm's length of one another, including minimizing or canceling large in-person meetings and conferences.
- Urge employees to stay home when they are sick and maximize flexibility in sick leave benefits.
- Do not require a doctor's note for employees who are sick as healthcare offices may be very busy and unable to provide the document immediately.
- Consider use of telecommuting options.
- Some people need to be at work to provide essential services of great benefit to the community. They can take steps in their workplace to minimize risk.

Businesses are encouraged to carefully review and follow the [CDC Business Guidance](#) for businesses, as well as our recommendations for gatherings and non-essential events.

3) **Large Gatherings: Cancel Non-essential Events**

At this time, we recommend postponing or canceling large community events and gatherings where people will be within arm's length of one another is recommended. This includes concerts, sporting events and conventions where people will be within arm's length of one another.

Consider canceling or postponing smaller gatherings if those most likely to attend are within the high-risk category.

If you can't avoid bringing groups of people together:

- Urge anyone who is sick to not attend.
- Strongly suggest that seniors over 60 and those with chronic medical conditions to not attend.
- Assure hand washing capabilities, hand sanitizers and tissues are available.
- Frequently clean high touch surface areas such as computers and hand rails.
- Find ways to create physical space to minimize close contact as much as possible.

- Avoid touching their face.
- Avoid personal contact such as shaking hands and hugging.
- Clean surfaces with disinfectants or sanitizing cleaners or wipes.

Please carefully review and follow the CDPH Guidance for [large gatherings and events](#).

4) **Schools: Safety First**

The San Benito County Public Health Services is not recommending closing schools at this time.

If a staff member or student in a specific school is confirmed to have COVID-19, consideration will be made as to closure of that school based on the specific facts and circumstances of that case. If there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 at a school, public health services will work with the school and the district to determine the best measures including potential school closure. At this time however:

- Do not go to school if sick.
- If you have a child with chronic health conditions, consult your doctor about school attendance.
- Equip all schools and classrooms with hand sanitizers and tissues.
- Recommend rescheduling or cancelling medium to large events that are not essential.
- Explore remote teaching and online options to continue learning.
- Schools should develop a plan for countywide school closures, and families should prepare for potential closures.

Schools are encouraged to carefully review and follow the CDPH Guidance for [K-12, preschool, and childcare centers](#).

5) **Health Care Settings: Avoid as possible, protect the vulnerable**

- Long term care facilities have plans in place for protecting patients, staff and visitors.
- Avoid visiting family and friends who are in the hospital or long-term care facilities if you are ill. Expect possible modification of or restrictions to visitation at facilities.
- Call your health care provider ahead of time if you are ill, and you may be able to be served by phone.
- Do not visit emergency rooms unless it is essential.

6) **Everyone: Do your part**

The best way for all residents of San Benito County to reduce their risk of getting sick, as with seasonal colds or the flu, still applies to prevent COVID-19:

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Cover your cough or sneeze.

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Try alternatives to shaking hands, like an elbow bump or wave.
- If you have recently returned from a country, state or region with ongoing COVID-19 infections, monitor your health and follow the instructions of public health officials.
- There is no recommendation to wear masks at this time to prevent yourself from getting sick.

For additional information on reducing the risk of getting sick please carefully review and follow [CDC Resources for Households](#).

You can also prepare for the possible disruptions to community services and supplies. Preparedness actions include:

- Prepare to work from home if that is possible for your job, and your employer.
- Make sure you have a supply of all essential medications for your family.
- Prepare a child care plan if you or a care giver are sick.
- Make arrangements about how your family will manage a school closure.
- Plan for how you can care for a sick family member without getting sick yourself.
- Take care of each other and check in by phone with friends, family and neighbors that are vulnerable to serious illness or death if they get COVID-19
- Keep common spaces clean to help maintain a healthy environment for you and others.
- Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned regularly with disinfecting sprays, wipes or common household cleaning products.

We urge our community to stay calm, don't panic, get prepared, stay vigilant, and be kind to one another. After all, it's the virus we are fighting.

For more information about novel coronavirus (COVID-19), see the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> and visit the San Benito County Public Health Services website for updated local information at <http://hhsa.cosb.us/publichealth/>.

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