



Tuolumne County Public Health Department

*20111 Cedar Rd. North
Sonora, CA 95370
Office: 209-533-7401
Fax: 209-533-7406
24-hour Phone: 209-533-8055*

Rebecca Espino
Health and Human Services Agency Director

Tuolumne County COVID-19 Update from Interim Health Officer

July 1, 2020

We understand that the past few months have been challenging for everyone. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our personal, business, school, and family lives, requiring a change to nearly everything we do. We may all be tired of hearing about the virus and are anxious to get back to our normal lives. However, as the data is showing, the virus continues to pose a danger to our county, our state, and our country.

Due to the progression of local disease activity related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Tuolumne County is no longer in the containment stage, and will need to focus on mitigation strategies. Containment of the disease relies on adequate and timely testing, isolation and quarantine, contact tracing, and case management. When unable to achieve those activities, broader mitigations measures must be used.

An example of mitigation strategies that may be implemented are those which have been proven to help reduce the spread of infectious disease, and which have been utilized earlier in the pandemic and currently:

- Closure in part, or in full, of certain business and activity sectors that are considered higher risk, such as those outlined by Governor Newsom on July 1st. Those include bars, indoor dining at restaurants, wineries & tasting rooms, family entertainment centers, museums, etc.
- Closures (new or continued) of group settings, such as schools and public/community events, parks and recreation areas.
- Promote and reinforce behaviors that prevent spread; physical distancing (stay 6 feet from others), avoiding gatherings, wearing of face coverings (currently required statewide), good hand hygiene (wash and/or sanitize) and respiratory etiquette (sneeze/cough into your elbow or a tissue) and staying home when sick.
- Maintain healthy operations; encourage teleworking, protect those at higher risk for severe illness, implement flexible and non-punitive leave policies for workers, etc.

Several factors have contributed to this change in response strategy. Individuals continue to attend multiple gatherings with others who are not part of their household, travel outside of their community for non-essential needs, and cases have resulted in many hundreds of contacts. This also creates a situation where we are unable to identify all contacts. In addition, due to this extremely large number of contacts, we have exceeded our local capacity for lab processing and are now relying on multiple external labs, so there will inevitably be delays in getting results.

Public Health will continue to make every effort to communicate with all individuals who we know have been exposed, but we cannot, in every case, be sure that we have contacted everyone. We will advise all parties to isolate and quarantine, but our community should understand that not all individuals may be cooperative in following those instructions. While most people understand the importance of following these requirements to prevent further spread of the disease, we have experienced dozens who have not been cooperative, risking the health and safety of those around them, and their community.

We are also aware that many businesses and facilities are not complying with state guidance and regulations for safe operation. These measures are put in place to mitigate disease transmission, and by not following them, our community is at greater risk for continued spread of disease and severe impact to our essential workforce and industries, as well as our healthcare system.

We will continue to clearly communicate the importance of wearing a face covering when in public, avoiding gatherings of any size with people outside of your own household, and limiting the number of times you leave your home, especially for non-essential tasks.

Physical distancing and wearing a face covering are expected to be an important strategy for some time, and people should know that these are simple steps that they can and should follow to help us mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

Our efforts to get back to the containment stage include mobilizing additional staff to assist with contact investigation and continuing to work with the state and regional laboratories to optimize lab processing capacity.

Rather than seeking to find ways around state and local health orders, guidelines, and recommendations, we implore the public to exercise patience and understanding as we navigate through this pandemic. Follow public health recommendations and directions, and remember that your actions could impact your friends, your family, your co-workers, your customers, your patients, and your county.

We can come together; we can do what is necessary to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Thank you for doing your part to protect your loved ones and your community.



Dr. Liza M. Ortiz
Tuolumne County Interim Health Officer