

HEALTH ADVISORY: Community Interventions to Limit Surge of COVID-19 *Recommendations to limit social & household transmission*

December 8th, 2020

Summary

Health and social providers, community organizations, and local agencies are advised to support new recommendations that limit the surge of COVID-19 cases. With worsening pandemic fatigue amidst new restrictions, community members can be empowered by understanding that the virus is very transmissible even without symptoms, to choose recommendations in 3 areas:

- Always mask in public, particularly when talking.
- Small “Social Support Bubble” with only 1-2 households.
- Mask – Isolate – Quarantine – Test. Immediately as symptoms develop or after a possible exposure.

Background

Surge in cases. Like much of the region, state and nation, San Mateo County is surging with more COVID-19 cases in all regions, ethnicities, and age-groups, particularly young adults. Much of the transmission appears to occur in households and because of indoor social gatherings, as well as insufficient or inconsistent use of face coverings.

State of California. Governor Newsom and California Department of Public Health have established a San Mateo County “Purple Tier” assignment, night-time curfew, and a regional Stay-at-Home order when ICU capacity falls below 15%.

Bay Area: Counties in the Bay Area work together to support its residents, workers, and health services. San Mateo County assesses the impact of cases and hospital capacity within its own county and regionally. Some counties have instituted restrictions beyond those ordered by the Governor.

San Mateo County: To address this surge, community leaders emphasize three strengths of their county:

1. **Support for community health.** In general, businesses and community members have followed public health guidelines to ensure that all people in San Mateo County are safe, including vulnerable communities.
2. **Recognizing pandemic fatigue.** Governmental *requirements* and health *recommendations* must consider the many months of worsening of mental health conditions, social isolation, and pandemic fatigue.
3. **Belief in science.** San Mateo County residents and workers have followed disease control principles throughout the pandemic, including:





washing hands, covering cough, 6-ft distancing, and facial coverings. However, the unusual transmission features of this virus have not been being clearly explained to the general public by federal agencies.

Science & Epidemiology Updates

1. SARS-CoV-2 virus. Scientists are now better understanding two important aspects of the virus, which can help our communities prevent transmission:
 - a. **Transmission without symptoms.** Over 50% of transmission occurs from asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic people.
 - b. **Airborne small droplets increase when people talk, shout, or sing.**
2. Social Epidemiology. Much of the preventable transmission occurs because of **social gatherings** and **within households**, particularly from asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic individuals. The pandemic is causing significant stress across the board and many people need psychosocial support to increase their wellness and ability to function in these unprecedented times.
3. Testing. PCR testing is now widely available through health care providers and community-testing sites within 48 hours. Anyone who develops symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 or was potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19 should immediately mask, isolate from others, including household members if possible, and then seek testing.

Recommendations: *based upon community-strengths and science*

San Mateo County advises that all community members follow public health recommendations and orders. With the virus increasing throughout the county, county health officials strongly recommend that communities, workplaces, and individuals choose additional strategies that prevent asymptomatic transmission, including:

1. Always mask in public, particularly when talking.

Whereas county residents are generally wearing masks, many remove them when talking to friends – which is how transmission occurs.

- a. Schools and preschools: Require masks for children >2yo.
- b. Workplace & Public: Whenever possible, conversations should be in a quiet place, so that physical distance can be maintained and shouting and removing masks to be heard is not needed. *Loud conversation and yelling increase airborne small droplets* and thus, transmission risk.
- c. Dine with household members only. *While masks are removed for eating and drinking, talking with non-household members and particularly shouting across tables increases transmission risk.*



2. Small “Social Support Bubble” of only 1-2 households.

Whereas it’s safest to avoid contact with anyone during the pandemic, most people will need some social support. Limiting the size of the social support bubble is important at all times but especially when the virus is widely circulating in the community.

- a. San Mateo County residents: If needed, form a small, stable “social support” bubble of only 1-2 households. Provide love, care, and support for each other during these difficult next weeks. Do not introduce any infection into the bubble. Wearing a mask within a social support bubble provides more protection.
- b. Please do NOT socialize with multiple households. *Many outbreaks have started from asymptomatic transmission by “small gatherings”, which are then introduced into many household bubbles.*
- c. Local Governments: Allow parks and outdoor recreation to remain open for households, which will improve mental health.

3. Mask – Isolate – Quarantine – Test. Immediately as symptoms develop or after a possible exposure.

Prevent household transmission by immediately initiating the MIQT strategy, before test results.

- a. Anyone developing symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 should **IMMEDIATELY** isolate themselves, mask all household members, quarantine household contacts then get tested.
 - i. **Mask for all:** The symptomatic individual and everyone else in the household should wear a mask. *SARS-COV-2 is most infectious in the 2 days before, and the first 5 days after the onset of symptoms.*
 - ii. **Isolate:** The symptomatic individual should stay in a separate room and avoid common areas. *Open windows widely to increase ventilation, if possible.*
 - iii. **Quarantine** for household members and close-contacts should be considered.
 - iv. **Test** the symptomatic person immediately, along with any contacts developing symptoms.
- b. Anyone who is in close contact with a known or suspected COVID-19 case should be in quarantine, as recommended by public health authorities.