



Sonoma County
Key Messages: Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)
January 12, 2022

Key Messages are updated weekly, and used for County messaging to the community. Frequently Asked Questions and other relevant information is available at SoCoEmergency.org.

Vaccine Distribution

Milestones: As of today, 941,786 doses have been administered to Sonoma County residents.

Residents fully vaccinated: 365,903 - equal to 77.8 percent of the county's eligible population.

Residents partially vaccinated: 37,101 - equal to 7.9 percent of the county's eligible population

All residents 5 and older are now eligible for vaccination against COVID-19. As the Omicron variant spreads, our focus is on booster shots and testing. First and second doses are still vital, but we need to increase our rate of boosters administered because of the protection they offer against the worst outcomes of COVID — severe illness, hospitalization and death. While breakthrough cases in vaccinated people are rising, those cases tend to be mild or asymptomatic; unvaccinated people are exposed to the greatest risks. People who are unvaccinated here are 2.4 times more likely to be infected with the virus, but they are 17.9 times more likely to be hospitalized if they get COVID and they are 13.7 times more likely to die from COVID. More than 176,000 local residents have received a booster shot to date.

Children ages 5 to 17 can only receive the Pfizer vaccine. To date, 39 percent of children ages 5 to 11 in the county now are partially or fully vaccinated -- 14,500, more than 8,900 of whom are fully vaccinated. Children ages 12 and older are now eligible for a booster shot of the Pfizer vaccine. Regulators also shortened by a month the amount of time that adults and adolescents should wait between second and third doses, allowing them to seek booster shots five months after second injections.

More than 403,000 residents have received at least one dose -- 81.5 percent percent of the county's total population. That means nearly 86 percent of our eligible 5 and older population is now fully or partially vaccinated. By comparison, 71.9 percent of the eligible California population is fully

vaccinated with 8.6 percent partially vaccinated. Nationally, 79.2 percent of the eligible population is fully or partially vaccinated.

The county urges anyone who tests positive using an at-home antigen test to report the result by calling the county's COVID hotline at 707-565-4667.

The County's vaccine clinics page is continually updated. The pop-up calendar shows what clinics are operating each day. Use the county's testing page to find a site and book an appointment. High demand for testing means walk-ins are not being taken at most sites. A month ago the county was averaging 3,000 tests a day. The daily average is now more than 5,000. Demand is making it difficult to get tested at a site or to obtain at-home tests. Officials recognize how frustrating this can be, especially for parents as children return to school, and urge patience. The county is working to increase testing, and the state and federal governments hope to supply more at-home tests soon.

Current Sonoma County metrics:

- Our rate of new daily cases per 100,000 population is 172.8.
- Our case rate for unvaccinated individuals is 372.1 per 100,000 compared with 125.8 for vaccinated residents.
- Our overall testing positivity rate is 19.2 percent.
- Our equity metric testing positivity rate is 21.1 percent.

Health officer urges residents to stay home, restricts big gatherings

Due to surging COVID cases, Sonoma County Health Officer Dr. Sundari Mase on Monday appealed to residents to stay home as much as possible for the next 30 days and limit interactions with those outside of their immediate household. Dr. Mase recommends that people limit travel outside the home to just going to work or to school and making only necessary trips such as going to the grocery store or the doctor. She also issued a Health Order canceling large gatherings to prevent the further spread of coronavirus in the county. Large gatherings of more than 50 people indoors, or more than 100 people outdoors (where social distancing is not feasible), are prohibited for the duration of the order. The order took effect today and is scheduled to remain in effect until Feb. 11. "Our case rates are at their highest level since the pandemic began and our hospitalizations are climbing at an alarming rate as well," Dr. Mase said.

Among cases in Sonoma County where the source of transmission is known, more than half are emerging from big gatherings. This order will reduce the likelihood that many individuals will be exposed to COVID-19 at a single event, and will help slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

- Over the past two weeks, Sonoma County's case rate has increased from 28 per 100,000 to more than 172.8 new cases per 100,000 per day and is predicted to continue rising during January.
- Although evidence shows the Omicron variant often results in milder illness, especially among those who are vaccinated and boosted, local hospitals could still be overwhelmed during this surge due to the sheer volume of cases that are anticipated.
- COVID-related hospitalizations increased from 28 on Jan. 3 to 80 on Tuesday. During the winter surge a year ago, COVID hospitalizations in Sonoma County reached an average of 104 per day. Seven patients were in ICU beds, compared to 24 at times last summer and 26 last winter.
- Without additional mitigation efforts such as these steps, the state is projecting that the county could experience more than 380 daily hospitalizations, which could outstrip the resources of local hospitals, many of which are already taxed due to staffing shortages.

"We know what we need to do to prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed," Dr. Mase said. "The next 30 days will be key to helping us stop this rapid spread of this highly contagious variant in our community. We need to get vaccinated and boosted, wear high-quality masks, avoid large gatherings and stay home as much as possible."

Dr. Mase's appeal can be [viewed on YouTube](#). These [FAQs provide more information](#) about what is allowed, including spectators at sporting events. Gatherings of those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 also must be limited to no more than 12 people, except for family gatherings.

- A gathering is defined as any public or private event that brings people together in a single room or single space at the same time, such as in an auditorium, gymnasium, stadium, arena, large conference room, wedding venue, meeting hall, or any other indoor or outdoor space. These gatherings may have either assigned or unassigned seating, and may be general admission or gated, ticketed and permitted events.
- Large gatherings do not include those that occur as a part of regular school instructional events or outdoor recess, workplace settings, courthouse activities, places of worship, cafeterias, or any venue that is open to the public as part of regular operations such as shopping malls, stores, restaurants/food facilities and museums.

Dr. Mase also appealed for residents to upgrade the quality of face coverings to a surgical mask or a KN95, KF94 or N95 mask. "Those traditional cloth masks that many of us have been wearing are just not as effective in stopping the spread of this form of the virus." Her advice mirrors [new state guidance](#) on the best masks.

In addition to the impact on seniors and those with underlying health conditions, county health officials also are concerned that the surge will continue to disproportionately impact low-income communities of color. These communities face the highest risks of becoming infected with COVID-19 because of their disproportionate representation in the essential workforce, lack of sick leave/job protections, multigenerational households, use of shared transportation and other factors. Latinx residents have accounted for more than half (53 percent) of all cases in the county despite making up 27.3 percent of the population. They also have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths.

Other developments and trends

Case rates are expected to keep climbing for the next two to three weeks. A month ago, we were averaging about 60 new cases a day (12 per 100,000 residents). Now we are seeing more than 800 cases per day (172 per 100,000). Local hospitals and health care providers, along with many other businesses, are dealing with staffing issues because so many workers are testing positive. There are encouraging trends. Our high vaccination rate is an important reason why outcomes are not as bad as in other stages of the pandemic. People are not ending up in the intensive care unit like they were during other surges, and we have not seen a surge in deaths. When we do have a COVID-related death here, it is usually an unvaccinated individual with underlying conditions. The unvaccinated still account for most hospitalizations here.

- Five COVID-related deaths have been reported for December in the county. The county has reported 101 COVID deaths since July 1 after just one COVID death in May and four in June. Deaths typically lag hospitalizations by a month or more.
- Nearly all of the 421 reported COVID-19 deaths that have occurred in Sonoma County have been unvaccinated residents.
- New daily U.S. cases are averaging 761,000, up 185 percent in two weeks, according to a New York Times [database](#). Daily U.S. COVID deaths have increased 40 percent in the past two weeks to 1,730 a day. The United States has recorded 840,000 COVID-19 deaths.
- COVID-19 cases among U.S. children are increasing exponentially. For the week ending Jan. 6, more than 580,000 child COVID-19 cases were reported. This is a 78 percent increase over the 325,000 added cases reported the week ending Dec. 30 and an almost tripling of case counts from the two weeks prior. Nearly 8.5 million children have tested positive, according to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

Join us online today for a community update

A COVID-19 update with county health officials will be streamed at 3 p.m. today (Jan. 12) on the [county's Facebook page](#). The update will include the

latest health orders, information about the Omicron variant and the county's increasing case rate. A Spanish-speaking version will be streamed Thursday and both versions will be posted on the county's [YouTube channel](#).

What to know and do if you contract COVID

With many people testing positive these days, and with evolving federal recommendations, there is some confusion about what to do. If you test positive for COVID, the first thing you should do is isolate yourself for at least five days to protect your health and avoid infecting others.

- While isolating, stay in a separate room from those not infected. Use a separate bathroom if you can. Wear a good mask around others, even at home, and ask others in your home to do the same. Open the windows, when possible. If your residence has an HVAC system, make sure it has a fresh filter.
- Get a test on day five, and if it is negative you can end your isolation.
- The California Department of Public Health recommends a rapid antigen test, not a PCR test, to determine if you can exit isolation.
- If you can't get tested, you can end your isolation after 10 days if you don't have symptoms.
- If you used an at-home test, you should report the results to the county health department at 707-565-4667.
- Notify close contacts that they've been exposed. A close contact is someone who spent at least 15 minutes over a 24-hour period within 6 feet of a person who tested positive for COVID.
- People who are fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine after contact with someone who had COVID-19 unless they have symptoms. However, fully vaccinated people should get tested five to seven days after their exposure, even if they don't have symptoms, and wear a mask indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until their test result is negative.
- Unvaccinated people should stay home for 14 days after your last contact with a person who has COVID-19. If you have symptoms, immediately self-isolate and contact your health care provider.

Seek medical care if you display the following symptoms:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- Confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds (or an abnormally low reading on a pulse oximeter, if you have one).

CDC shortens isolation and quarantine periods: What that means

The CDC on Dec. 27 shortened by half the isolation period for people who contract the coronavirus, saying that those without symptoms could safely resume mixing with others just five days after their positive test results. CDC officials said the guidance is in keeping with growing evidence that people with the coronavirus are most infectious in the two days before and three days after symptoms develop. The guidance is not a mandate; it's a recommendation to employers and state and local officials. The isolation rules are for people who are infected. They are the same for people who are unvaccinated, partly vaccinated, fully vaccinated or boosted. The CDC last week issued an explanation of the difference between what it means to isolate and quarantine and why it recently recommended shorter periods for both. The update includes what to do in specific settings and circumstances. The California Department of Public Health has updated its guidance to align with the recommended isolation and quarantine time frames from the CDC. In this time of uncertainty due to Omicron, California added additional testing recommendations to exit isolation and quarantine and improved masking measures to protect the health of all Californians. The state recommends a negative test before ending isolation after five days.

State allows asymptomatic health personnel to keep working

Governor Gavin Newsom on Monday announced health care workers who test positive for COVID but are vaccinated and asymptomatic can still show up for work. According to the California Department of Public Health, this is not a requirement but gives hospitals flexibility in case of staffing shortages. The state has aligned with the CDC's shortened duration of isolation and testing considerations for health care workers who test positive for COVID-19. State public health also consolidated the CDC's conventional, contingency and crisis framework into "routine" and "critical staffing shortage" scenarios to reflect the current status of California health-care facility staffing levels.

The state's new guidance means that until Feb. 1, health care personnel who test positive for COVID-19 and are asymptomatic may return to work immediately without isolation and without testing. Health care personnel who have been exposed and are asymptomatic may return to work immediately without quarantine and without testing. These health care workers must wear an N95 respirator.

Large California study finds Omicron cuts hospital risk in half

A new study of nearly 70,000 COVID patients in California demonstrates that Omicron causes less severe disease than other variants. The research, posted online Tuesday, aligns with similar findings from South Africa, Britain and Denmark. Compared with Delta, Omicron infections were half as likely to send people to the hospital. And the people who came to the hospital with Omicron

stayed for a shorter period. The variant cut hospital stays by more than three days, a reduction of 70 percent compared with Delta.

Out of more than 52,000 Omicron patients identified from electronic medical records of Kaiser Permanente of Southern California, Dr. Joseph Lewnard and his colleagues found that not a single patient went on a ventilator during that time. "It's truly a viral factor that accounts for reduced severity," said Lewnard, an epidemiologist at the University of California, Berkeley, and an author of the study, which has not yet been published in a scientific journal. The researchers analyzed 69,279 symptomatic patients who tested positive for the coronavirus between Nov. 30 and Jan. 1. Three-quarters of the positive samples contained the Omicron variant; the rest were Delta. The researchers then followed the people who tested positive to see if they ended up in the hospital. They excluded the so-called incidental COVID patients who showed up at hospitals for other complaints and only tested positive for the coronavirus once they arrived. Fourteen of the Delta-infected patients died, while only one Omicron patient did. That difference translated into a 91 percent reduction in the risk of death.

Despite the less severe virulence of Omicron, cases are swamping U.S. hospitals. Dr. Lewnard said that this paradox was the result of the variant spreading like wildfire.

Omicron updates

The CDC estimates that the Omicron variant now accounts for 98.3 percent of COVID cases in the United States. The World Health Organization on Nov. 26 deemed Omicron a "variant of concern" after it was first identified in Botswana and South Africa.

- Booster doses of both the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines are likely to offer a substantial increase in protection against Omicron.
- All vaccines still seem to provide a significant degree of protection against serious illness from Omicron, which is the most crucial goal. But only the Pfizer and Moderna shots, when reinforced by a booster, appear to have initial success at stopping infections.
- Dr. Janet Woodcock, acting commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, on Tuesday said most Americans would be infected with the virus — a prediction that outside health experts have echoed. "What we need to do is make sure the hospitals can still function ... other essential services are not disrupted while this happens," she said. Dr. Anthony Fauci, chief medical adviser to the White House, today said Dr. Woodcock meant that "virtually everybody" will likely be infected eventually. But he added: "If you're vaccinated, and if you're boosted the chances of your getting sick are very, very low. ... We are not going to eradicate this, but we ultimately will control this."

- Studies on animals suggest that Omicron readily infects cells in the upper airway, but works poorly in the lungs, which could explain its milder effects.

U.S. insurers must now cover 8 at-home tests per month

Private insurers will have to cover the cost of eight at-home coronavirus tests per member per month starting on Saturday, the Biden administration said Monday. People who provide their insurance information will be able to get the tests with no out-of-pocket costs at certain pharmacies; in other cases, they will have to file claims to their insurers for reimbursement, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, just as they often do for medical services.

The plan “incentivizes insurers to cover these costs up front and ensures individuals do not need an order from their health care provider to access these tests for free,” the agency said in a statement. Roughly 150 million Americans, or about 45 percent of the population, are privately insured.

Insurers that do not require people to pay the upfront cost for tests at certain retailers will be charged no more than \$12 per test, if the test was purchased at an out-of-network site. Otherwise, insurers will be charged the full price of a test. The at-home tests are typically sold in packs of two, and prices have ranged in cost from \$14 to \$34. Tests ordered or administered by a health provider would continue to be covered by insurance without copayment or a deductible. Check out these FAQs for more information.

The new U.S. policy does not apply to at-home tests that Americans have already purchased. The Biden administration is also working on other efforts to get tests to people regardless of their insurance status, including a plan to deliver 500 million free rapid tests to the homes of Americans who order them, starting later this month through a new website in the works.

White House promises millions of free COVID tests to schools

The White House said today that it would distribute millions of free coronavirus tests to schools across the United States to try to keep classrooms open.

- Five million rapid antigen tests will be made available to K-12 schools across the country each month. States will have to apply for them. Once such requests are made, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will work to deliver the first shipments as early as this month.
- The White House also promised to make lab capacity available for five million free polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, tests, facilitated through three federally-funded regional providers each month. The providers will

offer testing materials, supplies, lab results and reporting at no direct cost to schools, which will have access to the services immediately.

Study: Popular at-home test detects most infectious Omicron cases

Abbott BinaxNOW, a widely used at-home test, can detect the vast majority of people who are infected with the Omicron variant and are carrying high levels of the virus, according to a new, real-world study of more than 700 people who visited a walk-up testing site in San Francisco. BinaxNOW is a rapid antigen test, which is designed to detect proteins on the outside of the coronavirus. Like all rapid antigen tests, it is less sensitive than PCR tests, which can find even very small traces of the virus. But rapid antigen tests have generally been good at catching people who have high viral loads and are most likely to be infectious.

The study, which has not yet been reviewed by experts, found that overall, the BinaxNOW detected 65 percent of the infections identified via PCR testing, but 95 percent of people who had the highest viral loads. Among those who had high levels of the virus, the tests caught 98 percent of those with symptoms and 90 percent of those without symptoms, researchers found. "It's working as it was designed," said Joseph DeRisi, a biochemist at UC San Francisco, co-president of the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub and an author of the paper. "There does not seem to be any performance deficit with Omicron." The findings come after some preliminary, small studies raised questions about whether rapid antigen tests might be less sensitive for Omicron.

U.S. considering effort to provide 'high-quality' masks to residents

The White House today said that it is considering a program to offer "high-quality" masks to Americans as the Omicron variant spreads rapidly. Jeffrey Zients, the White House COVID-19 response coordinator, offered no details about what type of masks might be distributed, how many or when. The White House has not yet settled on what the program will look like. One option would be making the masks available at community sites.

Zients said the government has a stockpile of more than 750 million N95 masks — considered the highest quality — for health care and emergency workers. Dr. Rochelle Walensky, CDC director, said today that the CDC is working to update its guidance on masks to address the differences in protection between various types.

Booster update: Pfizer booster authorized for 12- to 15-year-olds

The CDC and FDA last week authorized boosters of the Pfizer vaccine for 12- to 15-year-olds. Americans who received two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines also can now seek a booster shot five months after the second shot, and not wait six months, as earlier guidance had said. The agency also recommended that some immunocompromised children ages 5 to 11 receive

an additional primary vaccine shot 28 days after the second shot, matching the guidance for similar people 12 and older. Pfizer's vaccine is the only one authorized for pediatric use in the United States.

- 16- and 17-year-olds became eligible for Pfizer booster shots on Dec. 9. Sonoma County and other county public health agencies across the Bay Area on Dec. 17 urged everyone eligible to get vaccinated and, if eligible, get a booster right away to protect against the Omicron variant.
- Those 18 and older can use any COVID-19 vaccine approved by the federal government.
- Anyone 18 or older can choose either a Pfizer or Moderna booster five months after their last dose. For anyone who got the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the wait already was just two months.
- People can mix-and-match boosters from any company.

Other key information regarding booster shots:

- 176,616 boosters have been administered in Sonoma County since they were authorized for the first groups in September.
- 53.7 percent of eligible residents 12 and older have received a booster.
- 66,166 boosters have gone to those ages 65 and older.
- 2,637 boosters have been administered to children ages 12 to 17.
- The CDC reports that 76.4 million fully vaccinated people have received an additional vaccine dose in the United States.
- The Moderna booster is half the size of the primary dose administered.

Some at-risk Americans to be eligible for a 4th dose

Some people with a weakened immune system can get a fourth dose of the coronavirus vaccine as early as this coming week, according to recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that were updated last week. The CDC endorsed a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines for moderately or severely immunocompromised people on Aug. 13, but said this would be considered a part of the primary immunization, not a booster shot.

In October, the agency said those immunocompromised people could receive a booster shot — a fourth dose of vaccine, six months after their third dose.

These guidelines were consistent with its recommendation for other adults.

Last week, hoping to stem the surge of infections with the highly contagious Omicron variant, the CDC shortened that interval to five months for a booster shot for Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna recipients.

For immunocompromised people who received a single shot of the vaccine made by Johnson & Johnson, the CDC does not recommend additional primary doses, but advises that they get a booster shot of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines two months after the first dose.

Some people are born with absent or faulty immune systems, and in others, treatments for some diseases like cancer diminish the potency of immune defenses. The CDC estimates there are seven million immunocompromised individuals in the country. Many of them produce few to no antibodies in response to a vaccine or an infection. When they do become infected, they may suffer prolonged illness, with death rates as high as 55 percent.

County urges employers to require proof of booster

Employers should immediately require all workers to get a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, if eligible for one, or get tested at least twice weekly for COVID under new guidelines issued Dec. 28 by Dr. Sundari Mase, Sonoma County health officer. The guidelines are voluntary but strongly recommended to help mitigate a surge in cases and protect the health of workers, their families and vulnerable community members.

In addition to twice-weekly testing, employers should consider requiring unvaccinated and unboosted employees, if eligible for a booster, to wear an FDA-cleared surgical mask or respirator in indoor work settings.

Dr. Mase issued two health orders last month requiring booster shots or twice-weekly testing for local school employees and for personnel working in fire, law enforcement, emergency medical services, pharmacies, dental offices and temporary disaster shelters in Sonoma County. The mandatory orders take effect Feb. 1, although Public Health highly recommends that employers covered by the orders immediately begin testing unvaccinated and unboosted employees at least twice weekly.

Employers can require workers to be vaccinated, including having a booster. All County of Sonoma employees will be required to provide proof of vaccination and booster (when eligible) against COVID-19 or undergo twice-weekly COVID-19 testing. The anticipated effective date of the policy change is Feb. 1. The county, with more than 4,000 employees, is the region's largest employer.

The health orders and guidance are on the county's health orders page.

COVID outbreak at Sonoma County; 101 inmates test positive

About 100 detainees in the Sonoma County Jail have tested positive for COVID-19 in an outbreak that began when an employee tested positive on Dec. 28. As of Tuesday, 101 of the 701 inmates at the main jail have contracted COVID-19. The first inmate tested positive on Dec. 31. The Sheriff's Office said that 26 jail staff have either been exposed to or contracted COVID. The first positive case was an individual who is contracted to work at the facility and who is not employed by the Sheriff's Office. Three housing units at jail are under isolation. Jails and prisons are considered very high-risk settings for the spread of the coronavirus due to the difficulty of maintaining social distancing.

County Superior Court postpones trials that haven't started

Sonoma County Superior Court on Jan. 3 issued an emergency order delaying all civil and criminal trials not currently in progress until March due to the Omicron-fueled surge. All criminal jury trials that have not begun will be postponed to after March 1 or later. Civil jury trial proceedings are delayed to after March 31. The order outlines other safety measures.

- Everyone in the courthouse regardless of vaccination status must mask at all times, including employees, staff, attorneys, witnesses and the public.
- Judges may allow a defendant to briefly lower their mask for the purposes of identification for the record.

Sonoma County rescinds face mask exemption

Sonoma County on Dec. 29 joined four other Bay Area counties in rescinding exemptions to local public health orders that allowed stable groups of fully vaccinated people to remove their masks indoors in some workplaces, gyms, churches and other public settings. Everyone, regardless of vaccination status, must wear a mask in all indoor public settings, effective Dec. 30. Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin and San Francisco counties and the city of Berkeley removed similar exemptions in a coordinated effort to blunt a regional surge in COVID-19 cases. Sonoma County has required facial coverings in most indoor public settings since August.

Update on Sonoma County's pediatric vaccine campaign

More than 39 percent of the county's eligible children ages 5 to 11 have received at least one dose since the vaccine became available in early November. Twenty-four percent of those children are now fully vaccinated. Parents are encouraged to reach out to their pediatrician or a local pharmacy to find a vaccine for their children now that the CDC has endorsed the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children ages 5 to 11. Pharmacy appointments can be made through [Myturn.ca.gov](https://myturn.ca.gov). Dozens of vaccination clinics have been held at designated schools throughout the county to serve people who do not have convenient or affordable access to healthcare providers. Several school-based clinics are scheduled over the next week. A list of clinics is on the Sonoma County Office of Education website along with information for parents. Doses for those 12 and older will be available.

Local public health leaders, doctors, health clinics, schools, pharmacies and community groups are working together to educate families about the vaccine's safety and benefits and to ensure vaccines are distributed as quickly, safely and equitably. The county Office of Education and county health department will hold a joint webinar at 5 p.m. Tuesday (Jan. 18) that will offer parents the opportunity to learn more about the pediatric vaccine campaign and testing and what's being done to keep our schools safe.

The Sonoma County Office of Education last week distributed 67,000 antigen test kits to local schools to be distributed to families to use at home as school resumed. County education officials are now working on getting new masks distributed to schools.

- The county's pediatric vaccine campaign is planned with a focus on equity. The sites for school-based clinics are in areas with high case rates, a high number of English learners, and with lower vaccination rates. Those doses are intended for those school populations but no one will be turned away who is eligible for a vaccine.
- All doses will be available at no cost to children or their parents.
- Parents are asked to bring a photo ID with date of birth as well as medical and prescription insurance card (if insured). Nobody will be turned away for lack of ID.
- Consent forms will be required if a child is not with a parent or guardian; consent forms are available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).
- The campaign seeks to vaccinate half the eligible children ages 5 to 11 by Jan. 31, and 70 percent by Feb. 28.
- The CDC on Nov. 2 endorsed the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children ages 5 to 11. Children receive one-third of the dose authorized for those 12 and older, delivered by smaller needles and stored in smaller vials. A second dose will be necessary, three weeks after the first.
- The FDA authorized the Pfizer vaccine for 12- to 15-year-olds in May.
- Dr. Brian Prystowsky, a local Sutter Health pediatrician, [explains the benefits of the pediatric vaccine](#) in this video.
- [Vaccine testimonials](#) by doctors, students and local parents are also available on the Sonoma County Office of Education website.

Update on cases in local schools

The county, in collaboration with the Sonoma County Office of Education, is implementing measures to keep our schools as safe as possible. There have been 1,356 COVID-19 cases in schools in the county since classes started in August. Of these cases, 1,203 are students and 153 are staff members. The county is posting [school cases and other related data online](#).

- Under California's [guidance](#), students are required to wear a mask indoors, along with adults while sharing indoor spaces with students. Universal masking means that classrooms and schools will not be closed for a few cases.
- California updated its [K-12 Schools Guidance](#) and [Schools Guidance Q&A](#) with modifications to quarantine protocols and new information on school-based extracurricular activities.

Volunteers needed to help with pediatric vaccination campaign

Sonoma County is seeking volunteers to assist with our pediatric vaccination mission. We are particularly looking for people with Spanish interpretation abilities to assist parents and families at school clinics as well as health care providers who can help clinically with vaccine administration and answer vaccine questions. School-based clinics are planned through February.

- Volunteers should be friendly, compassionate, and able to assist with greeting, registration and general vaccine help at vaccination clinics.
- Most shifts are three to four hours in the afternoon.
- Multicultural and multilingual community members are preferred.
- See our [vaccination clinic calendar](#) for event dates and locations and [sign up through our partner](#).

Sonoma State to start spring semester classes mostly remote

Sonoma State University announced Tuesday that it will begin its spring semester with most of its courses moving to online instruction for three weeks. SSU President Judy Sakaki said she made her decision after Sonoma County's health officer this week ordered a 30-day ban on large gatherings and urged residents to stay home except for essential activities, such as work or school. The county health order will be in effect through at least Feb. 11. Sonoma State's move to online instruction will be in place from the start of the semester on Jan. 24 until when the county health order expires. SSU joins about half the 23 CSU campuses in switching to online classes.

- Sonoma State is requiring students, staff and faculty to present proof of a booster COVID shot to attend classes or work in person. The deadline for that mandate is Feb. 28. California State University said on Dec. 22 that it will require students, faculty and staff at its campuses to get booster shots for the spring semester.
- The University of California on Dec. 21 announced a similar mandate for its 10 campuses.
- Santa Rosa Junior College President Frank Chong said he expects a booster decision this month after SRJC returns from break.

Local vaccination strategy and availability

The County and its health partners are collaborating to make vaccines available where and when it is most convenient and where they are most needed. The county's [vaccination calendar](#) is continually updated. Residents who need help making an appointment can call the hotline at 707-565-4667 in English and Spanish.

In addition to pop-up clinics, multi-day clinics include:

- Sutter operates a daily clinic at 2360 Mendocino Ave. in Santa Rosa from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- The Roseland Community Center clinic is operated by Fox Home Health at 779 Sebastopol Road. It is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (ages 5-plus). No appointment needed for first, second or booster shots.
- Rohnert Park Community Center clinic at 5401 Snyder Lane is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. (ages 5-plus) Appointments needed.
- Alliance Medical Center's clinic at 1381 University Ave. in Healdsburg is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (ages 5-plus) Appointment needed. (707) 433-5494
- Fox Home Health's clinic is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 1400 N. Dutton Ave., Suite 17, Santa Rosa.
- Rohnert Park Health Center operates a clinic at 5900 State Farm Dr. Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 1:45 (ages 12-plus) and 3 p.m. to 7:15 p.m. (ages 5-plus). Appointment needed for first, second or booster doses, call (707) 559-7500.
- Petaluma Health Center's clinic at 1179 N. McDowell Blvd. is open Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. and 1:30 to 4:45 p.m. Ages 12-plus. Appointment needed for first, second or booster doses, call (707) 559-7500.
- Sonoma Valley: Sonoma Valley Health Partners holds clinics at different sites, including at schools. Go to svhpnvaccines.org for details.

Testing updates, including local availability

The county is now averaging 5,000 tests a day. As demand surges for testing, both PCR and rapid, the County Department of Health Services continues to work with our testing partners to make more testing available. Testing is in short supply because of demand combined with staffing issues related to workers testing positive. Appointments are recommended as few sites can accommodate walk-in requests due to demand. The county's [testing page](#) includes a map to make it easier to find a convenient site. Residents can call the county hotline at 707-565-4667 (4701 in Spanish) for help making an appointment. PCR tests remain the "gold standard." Self-administered rapid antigen tests are available over the counter and online but they can be hard to find right now. Everyone is urged to report a positive at-home test result to the hotline.

Use the county's [pop-up testing calendar](#) to find a site.

Fox Home Health: Call 707-573-0223 x101 for an appointment.

- Roseland Community Center, 779 Sebastopol Road, Tuesday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Molecular Matrix: Make an appointment at the [Molecular Matrix website](#).

- Petaluma's Foundry Wharf, 625 Second St., Saturday, Sunday and Monday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Petaluma Valley Baptist Church, 580 Sonoma Mountain Pkwy., Thursdays and Fridays, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Andy Lopez Unity Park, 3399 Moorland Ave., Santa Rosa, Mondays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Redemption Hill Church, 2100 Petaluma Hill Road, Santa Rosa, Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

LHI: Appointments are highly recommended at <https://lhi.care/covidtesting> or call 866-284-8788. LHI offers testing from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at:

- Monte Rio Community Center, 20488 Hwy. 116, Monte Rio, Mondays
- Cotati Park and Ride, St. Joseph Way at Highways 116 and 101, Tuesdays and Wednesdays
- Petaluma Valley Baptist Church, 580 Sonoma Mountain Pkwy., Tuesdays, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Galvin Park, 3330 Yulupa Ave., Santa Rosa, Thursdays.
- Salvation Army, 721 S. McDowell Blvd., Petaluma, Friday
- A Place to Play Park, 2375 W. 3rd St., Santa Rosa, Friday
- Alliance Medical Center, 1381 University Ave., Healdsburg, Saturdays.
- Knox Presbyterian Church, 1650 W. 3rd St., Santa Rosa, Saturdays.
- West County High School, 6950 Analy Ave., Sebastopol, Sundays

Curative: Appointments are recommended; call 888-702-9042. Curative has had to close several testing sites because of staffing issues. Testing is available at these locations:

- Coddington (Target lot), 1000 Coddington Center, Santa Rosa, daily, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. cur.tv/coddington
- [Fiesta Plaza](#), 200 Siesta Way, Sonoma, Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. cur.tv/fiestaplaza
- Windsor Bluebird Center, 25 Bluebird Dr., Sunday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. cur.tv/windsor
- Rohnert Park Community Center, 5401 Snyder Lane, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. cur.tv/rohnertpark
- Healdsburg Community Center, 1557 Healdsburg Ave., Mondays, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. cur.tv/healdsburg
- Cloverdale High School, 509 N. Cloverdale Blvd., Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. cur.tv/cloverdale
- West County Community Services, 15010 Armstrong Woods Road, Guerneville, Wednesdays, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. cur.tv/west

- Geyserville Elementary School, 21485 Geyserville Ave., Thursdays, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. cur.tv/geyserville

On-site COVID-19 testing is available for businesses, health centers, congregate facilities, faith-based or community-based organizations or schools that would like to offer testing. They can partner with California's COVID-19 Testing Task Force to set up testing. To find out more, visit the task force's [Get Started](#) page. For local help with your organization's testing questions, email questions or requests to COVIDTest@sonoma-county.org.

The California Department of Public Health has created a [fact sheet](#) to help Californians understand when they should get tested for COVID-19.

Mortgage relief available for some homeowners behind on loans

California homeowners who have fallen behind on home loans can apply for a state grant to repay missed mortgage payments during the pandemic. The California Mortgage Relief Program covers past due mortgage payments in full through a grant of up to \$80,000 per household. The money will go directly to a homeowners' mortgage servicer. It's free to enroll and funds do not need to be repaid.

Applicants can visit CaMortgageRelief.org to check eligibility and apply through the online portal. Eligible applicants must be at or below 100 percent of their county's Area Median Income (\$116,300 for a household of four in Sonoma County), own a single-family home, condo or manufactured home and have faced a pandemic-related financial hardship after January 21, 2020, and also meet at least one of the following qualifications:

- They are receiving public assistance.
- They are severely housing burdened.
- They have no alternative mortgage workout options through their mortgage servicer.

Guidance for gatherings, travel

People who are not vaccinated should avoid travel and gatherings, according to [guidance from the California Department of Public Health](#). Residents planning to travel should make sure they have documents required by some destinations, airlines and events to prove their vaccination or testing status. Some destinations and events require a COVID-19 test or proof of vaccination. Research the requirements of your airline, destination or event to ensure you are prepared. Don't wait until the last minute to schedule an appointment. The latest [CDC guidelines for travel can be viewed here](#).

You can obtain a digital copy of your California vaccine record from [my vaccine record.cdph.ca.gov](https://my.vaccine.record.cdph.ca.gov). If there are problems with the digital vaccine record, they can take two to three weeks to fix. Keep your paper CDC card in a secure place; make copies and save pictures on your phone.

New state rules for visitors to hospitals, long-term care settings

Given the transmissibility of the Omicron variant, the state determined that amendments to the State Public Health Officer Order of Aug. 26, 2021, to make boosters mandatory and to require additional testing of visitors eligible for boosters who are not yet boosted, are necessary at this critical time for hospitals and long-term care settings, including skilled nursing facilities and residential care facilities. The [health order](#) took effect on Jan. 7.

Trust texts from 23393

California has produced a [video informing residents](#) that if they receive a text from the number 23393, it's an important message from California's COVID-19 response team and their local health department. Calconnect, the contact tracing database, uses a virtual assistant to reach out to COVID cases and contacts by text prior to them being called by a contact tracer/case investigator. The video [is also available in Spanish](#).

FDA approves first COVID pill that is effective against severe illness

The Food and Drug Administration on Dec. 22 [authorized](#) the first pill for COVID-19, offering a highly effective defense against severe illness. The drug, developed by Pfizer and known as Paxlovid, is authorized for COVID patients age 12 and over who are vulnerable to becoming severely ill because they are older or have medical conditions such as obesity or diabetes.

- Pfizer's laboratory studies indicate that its pills are likely to work against the Omicron variant.
- The treatment is meant to be taken as 30 pills over five days.
- A clinical trial indicated that Paxlovid was highly effective when taken soon after an infection. Pfizer's drug reduced the risk of hospitalization or death by 88 percent when given to high-risk unvaccinated volunteers within five days of the start of their symptoms.
- The government has ordered enough of Pfizer's pills to cover 10 million people, at a cost of \$530 per patient; supply will be limited at first.
- The U.S. [doubled its order](#) for Pfizer's pills last week, a move that will increase the nation's limited supplies of the treatment in the short term. The new order will eventually provide enough pills for 10 million Americans, bringing the government's total order to 20 million.
- Paxlovid appears to be substantially more effective than a similar antiviral pill from Merck (see below), known as molnupiravir, that was

approved Thursday by the FDA. In a clinical trial, Merck's drug reduced risk of hospitalization and death for high-risk patients by 30 percent.

FDA authorizes Merck pill for high-risk patients

The Food and Drug Administration has authorized a second antiviral pill for COVID but said it should not be preferred over other treatments. The FDA cleared the pill, developed by Merck and known as molnupiravir, for adults who are vulnerable to becoming severely ill from COVID and for whom alternative treatment options are "not accessible or clinically appropriate." The agency's decision reflects concerns that Merck's pill is only modestly effective and carries possible safety risks, including for pregnant women. Merck's treatment is expected to be available early next month.

- Older people and those who have conditions like obesity, diabetes or heart disease would be eligible to get a prescription for Merck's pills if they become sick from the coronavirus and cannot get treatments like Pfizer's newly authorized pills or monoclonal antibody drugs. Both vaccinated and unvaccinated people will be eligible.
- While the FDA authorized Pfizer's treatment for high-risk COVID patients as young as 12, it said that it was authorizing Merck's drug only for adults because it "may affect bone and cartilage growth."
- Merck's treatment is meant to be taken as 40 pills over five days.

Vaccinations not linked to pre-term births, study finds

Women who received COVID vaccinations while pregnant were at no greater risk of delivering their babies prematurely or of giving birth to unusually small babies than pregnant women who did not get vaccinated. The study was one of the first to examine the health of babies born to women vaccinated during pregnancy. An earlier study found that women vaccinated during pregnancy did not face a higher risk of miscarriage than the unvaccinated. The new study looked at some 46,079 singleton pregnancies that resulted in a live birth, including 10,064 among women who received one or more doses of vaccine between Dec. 15, 2020, and July 22, 2021, during their pregnancies. Most had received the vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna.

CDC recommends Pfizer, Moderna vaccines over J&J's

There are three COVID vaccines available. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has full FDA approval for persons ages 16 and older, and emergency Use Authorization for use in persons 5 to 15 years of age. The Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines have been approved by the FDA for emergency use. The CDC recommends the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines as preferred options to the Johnson & Johnson vaccine when possible.

- The CDC's expert advisers cited increasing evidence that Johnson & Johnson's shots can trigger a rare blood clot disorder now linked to dozens of cases and at least nine deaths in the United States in the last year. The risk was greatest among women 30 to 49, estimated at 1 in 100,000 who had received the company's shot.
- The J&J vaccine will remain an option for people who are "unable or unwilling" to receive shots from Moderna or Pfizer, the CDC said.
- 16 million people in the United States have received the J&J vaccine as their primary immunization, compared to 73 million fully immunized with Moderna's and 117 million with the Pfizer shots.

COVID was the leading cause of death among police officers in 2021

COVID-19 was the leading cause of death for law enforcement officers in the United States for the second year in a row, according to a report by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. A total of 458 officers died in the line of duty last year, making it the deadliest year in more than 90 years and a 55 percent increase from 2020, according to preliminary data compiled by the organization. The report found that 301 federal, state, tribal and local law enforcement officers had died because of COVID.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program

Sonoma County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program offers financial support to tenants and landlords. Apply on SoCoEmergency.org/ERAP, call 2-1-1 for an operator to assist in English and Spanish or visit the online page for a list of organizations that can assist in applying. Other key information:

- The program provides payment assistance for tenants who are behind on rent and utilities. It also provides options for landlords to participate and receive financial assistance.
- This program is open to all residents, regardless of immigration status.
- The expanded program removed the limit of one application per household, removing restrictions on applications from roommates.
- Individuals also can apply for 100 percent of utility bills to be paid.
- Tenants may apply for a total of 18 months worth of rental support.

Resources and useful links for residents and business owners

- Free COVID-19 testing is available for tribal communities at Sonoma County Indian Health Project. Call 707-521-4500 for details.
- Listos California offers disaster preparedness information in indigenous languages at its Farmworkers Initiative webpage.
- Information for businesses is available at SoCoLaunch.org.