



DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Promoting and protecting health, well-being, self-sufficiency, and safety of all in Marin County.



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Dear Marin County Business Community,

December 9, 2020

I'm writing to address questions some of you have raised following our decision to adopt the Stay at Home Order in Marin County. I know that this decision has deep impact on each of you, in both your personal lives and your livelihoods.

Of the many decisions we face related to the COVID-19 response, those that restrict the mobility and freedom of our community are by far the most difficult to make.

Yesterday, the day our Stay at Home Order went into effect, Marin County experienced 90 new cases of COVID-19. One month ago, we were seeing about 10 new cases daily. Today we have more COVID-19 patients hospitalized than at any time since the July surge, and only 14 percent of Marin County ICU beds are available. Our hospitals are unable to accept transfers of critically ill patients from outside the county, despite several requests. This pattern was anticipated and informed our decision.

On December 3 the state Public Health Officer announced the Regional Stay at Home Order in response to surges in cases and hospitalizations statewide. The order is triggered when a region's total ICU capacity drops below 15 percent. Three of California's five regions are now under the Stay at Home order.

Throughout the pandemic, I've been aligned with other Bay Area Public Health Officers in our regional response. We share the same populations, hospital resources, and patients. We approached this question together: Do we adopt the Stay at Home Order now, or wait until Bay Area ICU capacity falls below 15 percent? I, along with Public Health Officers in four core Bay Area counties and the City of Berkeley, chose not to wait.

Waiting until only 15 percent capacity remains provides too little reserve when demand is surging. Today, the Bay Area regional ICU capacity is 21 percent and has been steadily declining. We felt it was critical to take action to stop the downward trajectory.

It may be difficult to see what a lack of ICU beds would look like for Marin. The ICU's of our three hospitals provide life-saving care, not only for COVID-19 patients, but for patients with heart attacks, strokes, and other critical conditions. When ICU's are full, hard decisions have to be made on how to and where to care for the next critically ill patient.

So far in the pandemic, we have been spared the experience of an overwhelmed hospital system in Marin. My greatest concern is that the current trends will continue

to accelerate, and the image of patients being cared for in hallways by exhausted staff, or being transferred to distant counties could become real.

We are a tight community, and if our healthcare workers are unable to provide the best local care for our sickest family members, because there are simply too many to care for, it will have a deep and lasting effect.

My hope is that seeing this as a real and present threat will remind us all to stay at home and will clarify the rationale for issuing the order at this time.

We have learned when strong action is taken early to limit mobility, limit interactions between residents, and limit gatherings of any kind, it limits the severity and duration of a virus surge. We must now assume transmission risk is present in all settings.

This action supports long-term stability and will quicken our recovery.

I am keenly aware of the social, emotional, and economic toll of restrictions on our everyday lives and livelihoods. The decision to adopt the Stay at Home Order was made with the conviction that any delay will be measured in deeper economic harms, illness and deaths.

There is light on the horizon, and Marin will be receiving a very limited number of doses of vaccine next week, for staff in skilled nursing facilities and hospital, and more on the way. Thank you for doing your part to flatten the curve, hopefully for the last time, in Marin.

Yours in Health,



Matt Willis, MD, MPH
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