

Contra Costa Health Reaches for Zero Preventable COVID-19 Deaths

Contra Costa Health (CCH) has launched a new initiative that refocuses the county's emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic on eliminating preventable deaths in Contra Costa County.

The effort, called Path to Zero, includes tactics to increase use of underutilized COVID-19 protections in the county, particularly prescription of medications and home testing resources, and particularly in communities where infection and death rates are highest.

"No one should die from COVID-19 when free testing, vaccines and effective medication are all readily available in our community. Preventable COVID-19 deaths in our county are unacceptable," Contra Costa Health Director Anna Roth said. "The time has come for us to think differently about this virus. When a member of our community dies from COVID today, we should understand why and then work to remove any barriers to treatment that may have contributed to that death."

CCH has opened the Contra Costa Health Plan advice nurse line to any county resident who tests positive for COVID-19 (PCR/lab or home test). Advice nurses screen callers and schedule free telehealth appointments and prescriptions for treatment, if medically appropriate.

Most people 12 and older can get a prescription for antiviral medication that reduces the risk of serious illness or death, but it works best within 48 hours of a positive test result. Call 1-877-661-6230 if you test positive to make an appointment for a free same-day consultation.

CCH also issued a health advisory to community medical providers urging them to ensure that all county residents who test positive for COVID-19 have timely access to medicine if appropriate for the patient's health background.

In coming weeks CCH will roll out additional efforts to reduce preventable COVID-19 deaths, intended to reduce spread of the virus in the community, save lives through early testing and treatment, and to address social inequities that place many residents at higher risk of dying from COVID-19.

"There are stark differences in COVID mortality rates between our wealthiest, healthiest neighborhoods and those with significant challenges to community health," said Gilbert Salinas, CCH Chief Equity Officer. "Path to Zero helps us to sharpen our focus on our most vulnerable communities."

The Path to Zero campaign will be informed by a mortality review team of medical experts who will comprehensively analyze the county's COVID-19 deaths to better understand possible missed opportunities to access care and treatment, and to prevent deaths more effectively. Mortality review is a medical best practice used to fight many other diseases, including tuberculosis and HIV.

"We already know many of the steps we need to reduce preventable deaths in our county," said Dr. Ori Tzvieli, Contra Costa's Health Officer. "This approach allows us to fine-tune our efforts to ensure we provide maximum benefit where it is needed the most."

The mortality review process will help CCH develop an evidence-based description of what a "preventable" COVID-19 death looks like – typically one in which the patient did not have access or did not use some of the means available to reduce risk of serious illness or death as the result of infection.

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