

Los Altos Town Crier

June 3, 2020

Partnerships produce COVID-19 testing sites in Mountain View

Special to the Town Crier

Santa Clara County Supervisor Joe Simitian last month unveiled three pending COVID-19 testing sites in Mountain View for county residents.

According to Simitian, plans are in the works for:

- Testing led by and in partnership with Planned Parenthood Mar Monte in Mountain View. Simitian said “there’s every reason to believe” Planned Parenthood will get its site up and running this week.

“The folks at Planned Parenthood already have experience testing their own patients locally, and they’ve been operating testing sites for the broader community in other parts of the state,” he said. “That experience will serve us well here in Santa Clara County.”

- Testing led by and in partnership with El Camino Health, which includes El Camino Hospital in Mountain View. Simitian said his office has been working with the leadership at El Camino Health, including CEO Dan Woods, to forge a partnership. The effort got a boost last month when the El Camino Healthcare District Board authorized an expendi-

ture of up to \$1 million to be devoted to community-wide testing for district residents, Simitian added.

“We are pleased to be able to do our part and help fund testing efforts within our district,” said Gary Kalbach, El Camino Healthcare District Board chairman. “The board was united in supporting this pressing health-care need and making tests more widely available.”

- Testing offered directly by the county using a mobile testing van, beginning in and returning to Mountain View. The mobile testing van, operated by the county’s Valley Medical Center, deployed two weeks ago, making its first visit to the Mountain View Community Center on Memorial Day.

“The city of Mountain View in particular deserves a shout-out for helping with locations and logistics, which are indispensable to the success of these efforts,” Simitian said.



Simitian

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TESTING

Ramping up testing

Simitian said the county is “finally getting some traction” on testing.

“It’s not yet as much as I’d like to see, and it’s certainly not as fast as I’d like to see, but it’s progress,” he said. “You can’t fight the virus if you can’t see it, and you can’t see if you don’t do the testing.”

Simitian noted that a stepped-up testing program is important for a number of reasons, including:

- To find those who are infected with COVID-19 whether symptomatic or without any symptoms.

- To protect co-workers and family who might be at higher risk if infected by the virus.

- To keep the community safer, allowing for more confidence in making any changes

in the current order and charting a path back to normal.

- To provide a tool for businesses, nonprofit groups and schools to keep themselves safe when operations resume.

- To enable friends and families to safely reconnect.

Simitian said it has been frustrating to see existing testing capacity underused, a fact he attributes to a lack of clarity about who can access available sites and how.

“We need to make it easy for people who need or simply want to get tested to find a place they can go – quickly and conveniently,” he said. “And we need to communicate that information in a fashion that is clear, crisp and consistent.”

For more information on county testing sites, visit sccgov.org/sites/covid19/Pages/covid19-testing.aspx.

September 16, 2020

County slams private health providers for low testing rates, lingering biz restrictions



The county government defended itself from business complaints about slow Covid reopenings, blaming low test rates done by private healthcare providers.

PAUL BIRIS | GETTY IMAGES



By [Jody Meacham](#) – Contributor

Sep 16, 2020 **Updated** Sep 16, 2020, 5:59pm PDT

In a press conference designed as a powerful government response to business concerns over Covid-19's impact on business's ability to operate, Santa Clara County ramped up pressure today on large private healthcare providers to expand their Covid-19 testing.

Elected and appointed officials explicitly blamed them as a group — and repeatedly called out the largest local private provider, Kaiser Permanente, by name — for contributing to the county's slow pace of business reopening.

“There really is no excuse for large healthcare systems not to have stepped up and done their fair share, complied with the (June 10) public health order,” Supervisor Joe Simitian said in an online press conference packed with elected officials from the county and municipal levels. “If there is a need for greater capacity, then build it, buy it or pool your tests. ... The only way we're going to keep ourselves safe, get back to work, let a grandparent hug their grandkids safely, is by getting the testing done.”

Dr. Sara Cody, the county's health officer, said she could not quantify how much the lack of private
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testing has delayed the county's business reopening rules.

"But I can tell you that among the people who may have been infected and started a whole outbreak who were not identified because they didn't have access to testing, it's likely quite significant," she said.

"We have a finite pie, so really what we're asking is the private sector to do their part so that the public sector can continue to do our part," said Cindy Chavez, president of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. Today, Cody issued a revision of her June 10 health order requiring private providers to offer Covid testing that will take effect Sept. 25. Under penalty of fines of up to \$5,000 for each testing violation, it requires Kaiser Permanente, HCA Healthcare, Sutter Palo Alto Medical Foundation and other private hospitals to provide testing to all "essential workers," which the revised order now defines to include teachers, healthcare workers, grocery clerks and people who work in agriculture or food manufacturing.

Santa Clara County has been one of the most reluctant in the state and Bay Area, to allow certain businesses to resume normal operations, and county officials have come under increasing pressure from business leaders to speed things up.

Most recently, the Silicon Valley Organization held a press conference Monday in which owners of restaurants and personal care services such as nail salons questioned why the county has not allowed them to resume indoor service when the state's Covid business rules allow counties, such as Santa Clara to do so.

According to the county's latest testing statistics posted to its online dashboard, the daily testing rate of healthcare facilities in the county-owned system is 622, more than the combined testing rate of the five largest private providers and more than 600% greater than Kaiser, which serves more patients than any public or private system.

Simitian said about 600,000 of the county's 1.9 million residents are Kaiser members.

In a statement, Kaiser Permanente said it supported the county's call for more testing and has opened a new laboratory in Berkeley that will allow it to double its Northern California testing capacity to more than 12,000 tests per day by the end of September. "Everyone, including Kaiser Permanente, agrees more testing needs to be done throughout our communities to address the pandemic and we are committed to making testing timely and accessible for our members," said Irene Chavez, Kaiser's senior vice president and area manager for San Jose.

The online press conference included mayors of 10 Santa Clara County cities, who described problems with getting Covid tests themselves or who have constituents who've been unable to obtain them from their providers.

Saratoga Mayor Howard Miller, a Kaiser member who described himself as "not the smartest computer user with a master's degree in computer science from Stanford and 20 patents," said he had tried to use the provider's website through multiple browsers to schedule a test without

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success.

“A real citizen cannot schedule a test at Kaiser without making a phone call,” Miller said. “When you make that phone call, you will find out you have to talk to five different people before they were authorized to test. And when they do authorize the test, you'll find out that it's three days from now. And when you take that test, you'll find out the results are going to take three to four days to come back.”

San Jose Mercury News

January 8, 2022

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Big demand for at-home rapid test kits

Supervisor says sheer number required to meet growing need for residents is in the ‘millions’

By Gabriel Greschler
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As omicron cases continue to spike across the region and testing sites in Santa Clara County become bombarded with requests, local leaders now are calling for at-home alternatives to get pushed out to residents to help tamp down the ever-increasing

demand. “We got to get on it,” said District 5 Supervisor Joe Simitian. “We got to get on it fast.”

Simitian wants the county to quickly distribute at-home rapid tests to residents by Jan. 25, citing a strategy that officials in Colorado and Washington, D.C., have taken, as well as countries like the United Kingdom and Singapore.

While he envisions the tests could be either delivered to residents directly or picked up at a distribution center, the sheer number that he says is required to meet the demand is in the “millions” — considering the fact that the county has almost 2 million residents.

“The easier we make it, the more likely it is to happen (that people take a test),” said Simitian, who will bring the plan before supervisors at Tuesday’s meeting. “If you want folks to do something,

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Tony Vu, of San Jose, gets tested at the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds COVID-19 testing site in San Jose on Thursday.

SHAE HAMMOND
STAFF
PHOTOGRAPHER

Testing

convenience is key. That is the advantage of at-home COVID testing.”

The county already has distributed at-home tests this month — but the scale is much lower than what is needed, Simitian said.

Right now, the county is in possession of about 90,000 at-home tests that were offered from the state, but they are being prioritized for those in high-risk settings, like skilled nursing facilities, jails and homeless shelters. There’s also an effort by the federal government to hand out 500 million at-home tests to everyone in the country — but the details of that plan still are being hammered out.

According to County Executive Dr. Jeff Smith, the county is trying to build up its at-home testing stockpile to 180,000 by the end of the month, but it’s been challenging between the high costs and competition from others who also want them, and it still wouldn’t be the model or numbers that Simitian is looking for.

“No matter how we do it,” said Smith, “there’s gonna have to be some priority setting process. There’s not going to be sufficient numbers to just pass them out.” He said that the tests themselves cost about \$30 a pop — and that although the county is aiming to buy them in bulk and get a discount — just 180,000 tests could be a multimillion-dollar expense.

“It gets to be pretty expensive pretty quickly,” Smith said.

There’s also the challenge that at-home kits pose when



SHAE HAMMOND — STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

People line up in their cars to be tested at the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds COVID-19 testing site in San Jose on Thursday.

compared with PCR tests that the county offers at its public sites. The county hasn’t set up any sort of system for at-home test results to be reported — and PCR tests, considered the gold standard, are generally able to identify an infection much sooner.

But more at-home testing will be helpful no matter what, said Dr. Jennifer Tong, who oversees the county’s testing efforts.

“We certainly don’t object to the presence of rapid tests,” Tong said. “It does present challenges of tracking with data. But the alternative of saying ‘They shouldn’t be used’ is not reasonable right now. We’ll just have to live with the challenges of data.”

In addition to an at-home testing strategy, Simitian said two other actions also must be taken for demand to be met. For one, he said health care providers like Kaiser Permanente also should do their part to offer

tests to their members. The health care giant — which serves 4.5 million members in Northern California — currently is warning those wanting a test that there may be delays.

“Unfortunately, there may be longer than usual wait times for testing at our facilities — even if you have an appointment,” Kaiser’s website reads. “We’re doing everything we can to meet this high and growing demand.” A spokesperson for Kaiser did not respond to a request for comment.

In addition to health care providers’ efforts, Simitian also called on the county itself to open up more availability at its public testing sites. Though there is PCR testing at the Fairgrounds site in San Jose and in San Martin, availability is very limited. Staffing shortages have been the main reason for the delay, said Tong, who said the Fairgrounds site alone was conducting 5,000 tests a day. Prior to

omicron, the county was processing 1,500 a day.

On Monday, Tong said she had hoped for 25 additional workers to supplement the 75 that already are working at the Fairgrounds — but only eight showed up after the others called in sick.

This week, said Tong, the county switched the location where the tests are normally processed from Southern California to Texas after turnaround times started increasing.

“We would love to see it be higher,” said Tong about the capacity. “We are not satisfied, either. We are just continuing to do what we can to increase it.”

When asked about the staffing issue, Simitian said that the problem is “resolvable” and that the county must push forward.

“The fairgrounds have already tripled the number of tests they’re doing on a daily basis,” he said. “Good. But we have to keep going.”