

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS JANICE HAHN AND SHEILA KUEHL

April 28, 2020

**Expanding Testing in Congregate Living Environments**

COVID-19 has continued to spread throughout Los Angeles County (County), causing severe disease and death. Since the onset of COVID-19, it has been known to cause worse outcomes for those that are older than 65 and/or suffer underlying health conditions. In all of the County, 36% of COVID-19 related deaths, have been from those residing in Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs). Despite this knowledge, our more vulnerable older adults are continuing to suffer in congregate living environments, such as Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs), homeless shelters, long term care, assisted living, Board and Cares, etc. Without a comprehensive plan for robust testing at these sites, the County cannot adequately understand the complexity of the issue, nor can it improve upon the current situation.

After the recent completion of the Seroprevalence Study (Study) done in partnership with the University of Southern California, our Department of Public Health (DPH) can now report with certainty that the spread of disease by asymptomatic individuals is a much higher burden than we anticipated. While we had made assumptions, based on other infectious disease principles, that asymptomatic spread was

**MOTION**

SOLIS \_\_\_\_\_

RIDLEY-THOMAS \_\_\_\_\_

KUEHL \_\_\_\_\_

HAHN \_\_\_\_\_

BARGER \_\_\_\_\_

possible and likely, we assumed that the burden of the spread was from actively sick people, i.e. those experiencing symptoms of disease. The preliminary data from the Study suggests that as many as 280,000 to 547,000 adults in the County have been sickened with COVID-19 by April 9<sup>th</sup>, which is 35 to 68 times higher than the cumulative number of confirmed cases on that date.

Since our older, more vulnerable, population is already predisposed to worse outcomes from COVID-19, extra measures must be taken to protect and treat those residing in congregate living environments. DPH's early response included aggressive actions in the way of dedicating a team to visit and provide technical assistance for how to prevent the infections and how to control them with isolation, quarantine, and proper use of PPE. Despite these early measures, the cases have continued to explode in these settings, causing warranted alarm and concern over our loved ones. Furthermore, it is not just the residents of these institutional settings that are at risk, but the staff as well. Our data indicate that there are now well over 1000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 amongst the staff of nursing homes, homeless housing sites, and other institutional settings. If we truly want to ensure the health and safety of the residents of these sites then we must also protect the health of the staff that work in these essential facilities.

Up until this point, testing has been reserved for those that are symptomatic. While this approach was beneficial during a time of scarce testing resources, and without the knowledge that we now have regarding asymptomatic spread, it is no longer sufficient. In the absence of adequate treatment and vaccine, testing is one of the few tools we have to map out this disease's footprint and to help assist in policy decisions. With a devastating mortality rate amongst those residing in SNF's, the County must continue to prioritize testing for this population. Additionally, testing must be done frequently to test and monitor the healthcare workers in these facilities to ensure no unwanted asymptotic

spread is occurring. Consideration of the use of a fleet of mobile testing units should be considered in this plan, in order to address the need for on-site testing and clinical guidance. Further, the plan needs to outline how the County can safely benefit from the early use of emerging testing technologies, such as rapid tests and screening for antibodies. In order to address this issue, the County is in need of a high-level strategic plan for testing in our congregate living environments, under the leadership of DHS and in collaboration with DPH, in order to immediately scale up testing efforts.

**WE, THEREFORE MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors instruct the following departments to report back to the Board in 7 days on the following:

1. Department of Health Services, in collaboration with the Department of Public Health and any other relevant Departments, to report back to the Board on a high level strategic plan for expanding access to appropriate, high-quality testing in congregate living environments, with a specific focus on skilled nursing facilities and homeless housing facilities, including consideration of onsite testing and the role that the relevant County Departments will need to play in operationalizing the plan; and
2. The Department of Public Health to report back with a strategic and implementation plan for managing staffing, supply, and quarantine/isolation space issues within skilled nursing facilities to a) reduce otherwise unnecessary and potentially harmful secondary transfers of patients to acute care hospitals who are not in need of an acute level of care, and b) allow for appropriate and prompt discharge of non-acute patients from acute care hospitals.

# # #