

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS HILDA L. SOLIS

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AND JANICE HAHN

**Enhancing and Expanding COVID-19 Testing Response**

Los Angeles County once again finds itself in the midst of another staggering winter surge driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant. Each day, the County sets new daily records for confirmed cases, with some days over 30,000 new cases reported at an over 22% test positivity rate. And although early reports indicate that Omicron can result in fewer severe cases, its rapid spread can still result in healthcare systems being overwhelmed and can have massive detrimental impacts to the economy and society due to sheer amounts of infected and exposed individuals needing to isolate and/or quarantine.

Vaccinations, especially coupled with boosters, are playing an instrumental role in preventing those infected from becoming seriously ill or requiring hospitalization. Unfortunately, Omicron has shown an ability to evade vaccine protections against infections, thus testing is a critical tool in helping identify and isolate cases, quarantine exposed contacts who have not yet been vaccinated or received a booster when eligible

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SOLIS \_\_\_\_\_

KUEHL \_\_\_\_\_

HAHN \_\_\_\_\_

BARGER \_\_\_\_\_

MITCHELL \_\_\_\_\_

and help break chains of transmission.

The County has a massive testing infrastructure in place, with testing sites located in vulnerable communities county-wide, run by both County departments and by County partners. However, due to the skyrocketing demand for testing and strained staffing capacity, wait times at some testing locations can often take hours, and some partner sites are not able to offer appointments until days later. This situation is exacerbated by the nationwide shortage of rapid, at-home antigen tests, which are consistently sold out at stores and pharmacies across the County and the State.

In addition to breaking chains of transmission, testing is also essential for proper application of lifesaving antivirals. In December of 2021, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized two antiviral drugs – molnupiravir by Merck and paxlovid from Pfizer – that can help reduce the risk of hospitalization and death due to a COVID infection. The paxlovid pill has proven especially efficacious, with initial studies showing a reduction of hospitalizations by up to 90% if administered effectively. However, effective administration requires patients to take these drugs within the first 3 to 5 days of infection following a prescription from a physician, which is not possible without widespread access to timely testing to detect the virus early in its course of infection. Though supplies of these antivirals remain extremely limited at this point in time, it is anticipated that by late January, there will be more ample antiviral supply coming to the County, further underscoring the importance of expanded testing supplies.

Tests are also essential to ensure society continues to function. With Omicron spreading rapidly, tens of thousands of employees each day need to isolate and quarantine at home, disrupting and at times altogether shutting down services across

both private and public sectors. To help ameliorate this, the State and the County have reduced isolation and quarantine periods to end after 5 days instead of 10 as initially required, however it is contingent upon a negative test on day to help ensure that people are no longer infectious. Without expanded access to testing, specifically antigen tests, residents will be required to isolate and quarantine for longer, and disruptions to essential societal functions will continue to be impacted.

The County is already responding to this increased need for testing. The Department of Public Health (Public Health), in partnership with the State, secured over 600,000 rapid tests for widespread community distribution during the winter holidays. These tests were distributed to a wide range of partners to help reach residents most in need, including community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, community health clinics, cities, and County libraries. Although this measure helped mitigate some spread from gatherings, the demand continues to far exceed available supply, and it is clear that in the coming weeks, additional tests will need to be made available to communities to help identify, contact trace, and quarantine and isolate infected and exposed residents.

To further mitigate the spread, Public Health is receiving from the state 1.4 million rapid tests for students in public and charter schools. In coordination with the Los Angeles County Office of Education, these tests are being quickly distributed to school districts across the County to identify infected students and prevent spread of the virus at schools. Unfortunately, due to inclement weather across the country, half of the testing kits are delayed, further exacerbating the need.

Additionally, the Department of Health Services (DHS), which has overseen the

County's vast community testing infrastructure for the majority of the pandemic, has also responded by further increasing testing capacity at sites across the County by nearly 75%. DHS has extended hours of operation at sites across the County, while adding additional weekday and weekend dates to help reach essential workers. The Department is launching additional mobile testing units in hard-hit areas, with more sites coming online each day. Furthermore, the Department relaunched the Holiday Home Test Collection program, so any LA County resident who is symptomatic or was exposed to COVID-19 can order a home testing kit to be delivered safely to their residence, for residents to test safely at home and mail back their swabs for Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test results. Since the launch of the pilot, nearly 30,000 residents have already utilized this program, alleviating some of the strain at other community sites. DHS is also planning to launch a self-test pick-up and drop-off testing program at many County-operated sites using the home test kits. This program is essential; however, it is expensive to maintain, and additional financial resources will be necessitated to continue its operations for the foreseeable future.

Given the acute needs, the County must engage with federal, state, and commercial partners to acquire more supplies of tests and expand access to timely, convenient testing. Not only will this help contain the high rates of transmission across the County, but it is also essential to keep society running, schools open, and for effective implementation of life-saving antiviral medicines.

**WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office (CEO), in collaboration with the Department of Public Health (Public Health), the Department of Health Services (DHS), and Internal Services Department

(ISD), and in support of a coordinated community testing strategy, to:

1. Continue to work with State and federal partners to secure further allocations of rapid, at-home antigen tests for community distribution and, if necessary, identify potential funding sources, including the public health emergency funding identified in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Spending Plan approved by the Board on July 27, 2021, to support the procurement of antigen tests;
2. Continue to monitor new funding streams from State and federal sources, including the public health emergency funding identified in the ARPA Spending Plan, that could expand DHS' LA County Home Test Collection program throughout the duration of the surge, support the establishment of expanded testing capacity in areas of high need, including additional high-capacity drive-thru sites and new sites in convenient neighborhood locations, including but not limited to evening and weekend hours; and
3. Report back within 14 calendar days on the results of these efforts.

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