



San Francisco Department of Public Health

Grant Colfax, MD
Director of Health

City and County of San Francisco
London N. Breed
Mayor

Director's Report for Health Commission Meeting of December 7, 2021

A current overview of issues affecting the state of public health in San Francisco

<https://www.sfdph.org/dph/comupg/aboutdph/insideDept/dirRpts/default.asp>

Today, there are over 54,200 San Francisco residents with confirmed cases of COVID-19. And, sadly, a total of 675 San Franciscans have died. The San Francisco Department of Public Health (DPH) sends our condolences to their loved ones.

SF identifies the first Omicron variant case in the US

On December 1, the California and San Francisco Departments of Public Health confirmed that a case of COVID-19 among an individual in California was caused by the Omicron variant (B.1.1.529). The individual was a traveler who returned from South Africa on November 22, 2021. The individual is a San Francisco resident.

Genomic sequencing was conducted at the University of California, San Francisco and the sequence was confirmed at CDC as being from the Omicron variant. This was the first confirmed case of COVID-19 caused by the Omicron variant detected in the United States.

The recent emergence of the Omicron variant (B.1.1.529) further emphasizes the importance of vaccination, boosters, and [general prevention strategies](#) needed to protect against COVID-19. Everyone 5 and older should get vaccinated and boosters are recommended for everyone 18 years and older. San Francisco has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world at 81% of the eligible population, and is currently administering boosters to more than 5,000 vaccinated individuals a day. The City also has in place other safety protocols, such as universal masking in indoor public settings, and proof of vaccination requirements for certain businesses, as well as a robust testing and surveillance system. These safety measures put the City in a good position to fight COVID variants, such as Omicron.

For more information on the Omicron variant visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/index.html>.

DPH urges safer choices during holiday season, recommends boosters for all adults

As the winter holiday season is upon us, DPH supports safe celebrations and gatherings as an important part of recovery from the pandemic, especially when it comes to our mental health and overall wellbeing.

As we work to slow the spread of the virus, it is more important than ever to exercise caution and



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make safer choices to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during the holidays. There are many common-sense measures such as vaccinations, masking, testing that can help keep us safe and protect the most vulnerable among us from developing a severe case of COVID or becoming hospitalized.

SFDPH is now recommending COVID-19 boosters for everyone 18 and older to strengthen their immune systems. Boosters are now **essential** for anyone in a higher risk category, including seniors ages 65 and older; people with underlying medical conditions; people who live and work in high-risk settings; and anyone who received a Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Newly eligible for vaccines are children ages 5 to 11, and they should begin their two-dose vaccination series as soon as possible. A person is not fully vaccinated until two weeks after their second primary dose.

Keep in mind that San Francisco's [Safer Return Together health order](#) is still in effect, requiring indoor masks in most public settings where people come and go, such as retail stores, and proof of vaccinations where food and drink is consumed, such as restaurants and bars.

SFDPH guidance on celebrating safely includes the following:

- Get vaccinated against COVID-19, including children ages 5-11 now that they are eligible.
- Get a COVID-19 booster -- especially if you're a senior or at higher risk.
- Get a flu vaccine, which can be taken safely with a COVID-19 booster
- Choose outdoor activities over indoor activities, and limit being in crowds especially if you are unvaccinated
- Wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings, or whenever feasible in private indoor settings – especially when unvaccinated are present or the vaccination status of those present is unknown
- Wash your hands frequently and carry hand sanitizer wherever you go
- Delay travel until you are fully vaccinated. This means two weeks after completing your primary dose series (two doses for Pfizer and Moderna or one dose of Johnson & Johnson)
- Monitor your health and stay home if you feel sick, and get tested
- Consider testing within 72 hours before you travel or gather with others as you may have an asymptomatic infection. You can use an FDA-approved rapid at-home, self-test kit, reach out to your health service provider, a travel testing provider, or to receive a test, go to: sf.gov/gettested

San Francisco is making progress on vaccinating and boosting our residents as a result of the efforts of community partners and nearly 100 vaccination sites across the City that are within a 10-15-minute walk of most residents. These efforts will help the City avert a winter surge, in addition to San Franciscans making safer choices as they enjoy the holidays together.

For more information on where to get a vaccination or booster in San Francisco



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visit: sf.gov/getvaccinated.

One-year anniversary of Street Crisis Response Team

November 30, 2021 marked the one-year anniversary of the launch of the Street Crisis Response Team (SCRT). SCRT has grown from a single team supporting the Tenderloin neighborhood to six teams providing San Francisco with 24/7 citywide coverage in one year. SCRT responds rapidly to people who are having a crisis on City streets with a behavioral health approach that deescalates situations and addresses a person's immediate needs for care, treatment, and shelter.

Data from the year show that SCRT has taken more than 5,000 calls and engaged with nearly 3,000 people in crisis. In early 2022, a seventh team with six additional staff will launch.

Demonstrating the program's success as an alternative to law enforcement, SCRT diverted more than one-third of all 911 calls (38%) for "mentally disturbed persons" from law enforcement cumulatively during its first year of operation. With six teams launched, SCRT is now diverting over half (58%) of calls monthly for "mentally disturbed persons" from law enforcement. Once fully operational, SCRT seeks to divert 100% of calls.

Each SCRT team is staffed with a community paramedic from SFFD, a behavioral health clinician from HealthRIGHT360, and a peer specialist with lived experience from RAMS, Inc. (Richmond Area Multi-Services) who together have the range of specialty skills to engage on scene with a person in crisis. As of April 2021, SCRT is supported by a dedicated follow-up team that provides coordinated care linkages, often within 24-hours of the initial encounter. Since April, nearly a third (31%) of all people who interact with SCRT are successfully re-engaged with follow-up care such as being connected to a provider or treatment program.

SCRT is an important component of the City's Mental Health SF initiative for improving the mental healthcare for people experiencing homelessness. Most people who SCRT serves (76%) are currently experiencing homelessness, a condition that puts them at significantly higher risk for negative health outcomes and creates challenges in accessing services and long-term mental health and medical care. SCRT's street-based response offers a different approach from the traditional facility-based care by delivering support directly to communities.

If you see someone in a crisis, please call 911 and describe what you are seeing to the trained operators. More information about SCRT can be found at: sf.gov/street-crisis-response-team

DPH and Getting to Zero SF recognize World AIDS Day

On Thursday, December 2, Getting to Zero SF (GTZ-SF) hosted a virtual event marking World AIDS Day. World AIDS Day, designated on December 1st of every year since 1988, is an international day dedicated to raising awareness of the AIDS pandemic and mourning those who



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have died of the disease. The President of the United States has made an official annual proclamation for World AIDS Day since 1993. This year's Getting to Zero event acknowledged the overlap between the HIV/AIDS and drug overdose crises, both of which disproportionately impact vulnerable communities and have resulted in preventable deaths. Dr. Grant Colfax provided opening remarks and an interactive panel discussion included two DPH leaders—Dr. Philip Coffin, Director of Substance Use Research, and Dr. Nicky Mehtani, lead HIV clinician for the Street Medicine Program. Thank you to GTZ-SF and DPH leadership for raising awareness and centering collective action on this important day.

DPH Land Acknowledgment policy

In San Francisco, the [American Indian Cultural District](#) advocated that City government and agencies “Honor the First People of San Francisco, The Ramaytush Ohlone, by recognizing them and their ancestral homelands prior to all City meetings.” A Land Acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and respects the history and connection between the Ramaytush Ohlone and the region. DPH recognizes that this is an important step in acknowledging and honoring the land, culture, wisdom, and contributions of the Ramaytush Ohlone as the original peoples of the San Francisco Peninsula. This past summer, the San Francisco Health Commission [passed a resolution](#) to include this important recognition in public meetings. At DPH, we have expanded our policy, and now all DPH meetings with 20 or more people should begin by reading the following Ramaytush Ohlone land acknowledgment:

We acknowledge that we are on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush (rah-my-toosh) Ohlone (O-lon-ee) who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. As the Indigenous stewards of this land, and in accordance with their traditions, the Ramaytush Ohlone have never ceded, lost, nor forgotten their responsibilities as the caretakers of this place, as well as for all peoples who reside in their traditional territory. As guests, we recognize that we benefit from living and working on their traditional homeland. We wish to pay our respects by acknowledging the Ancestors, Elders, and Relatives of the Ramaytush Ohlone community and by affirming their sovereign rights as First Peoples.

Environmental Health Branch Agricultural Program

DPH Environmental Health's Agricultural Commissioner, Cree Morgan, and his staff recently confirmed public reports of an invasive plant species, *Dittrichia viscosa* (false yellowhead) growing in two parcels of land in the city. Previously, the only known North American locality for this plant was a small area along Highway 80 in Solano County. The California Department of Food and Agriculture considers this plant to be a Category A invasive weed species and represents a significant threat to California. Cree and his team immediately conducted surveys to determine the extent of the weed growth and were able to provide training for the safe removal of the plants which have now been double bagged and are awaiting proper disposal. This is just one example of the great



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work the Agricultural Program does every day to protect both San Francisco and the State of California from invasive species. Thank you, team!

Training offerings from the Trauma Informed Systems Initiative

The DPH Trauma Informed Systems Initiative (TIS) is offering two trainings this month to DPH staff. Registration links are below:

- December 8: [New Employee TIS 101: Transforming stress & Trauma during COVID](#)
- December 22: [Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute](#)

[SFDPH in the News](#)