



Public Health Division

County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH URGE INDIVIDUALS WITH MILD CORONAVIRUS CASES, OTHER NON-SERIOUS ILLNESSES TO AVOID TRIPS TO HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

(Santa Cruz County, CA) As the omicron variant spreads and COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations increase, Santa Cruz County public health officials are urging individuals with asymptomatic or mild coronavirus cases, or other non-serious illnesses, to avoid unnecessary trips to already burdened hospital emergency departments, and to get vaccinated or boosted if they have not already done so.

Local hospitals have recently experienced an influx of patients seeking emergency department care for asymptomatic or relatively mild COVID-19 infections, as well as cases of the flu or other seasonal illness. Most individuals who contract COVID-19 do not need to visit the hospital's emergency department and can effectively recover from their illness at home, or by seeking primary care treatment and/or speaking with their primary care provider

People with severe COVID-19 symptoms such as significant difficulty breathing, intense chest pain, severe weakness, or an elevated temperature that persists for days are among those who should consider seeking emergency medical care for their condition. Individuals should not visit the emergency department if the symptoms of their illness are mild to moderate – including a cough, sore throat, runny nose, or body aches – or simply for the purpose of having a COVID-19 test administered and should instead consult an outpatient primary care provider. Many providers have 24 hour nurse advice lines and this can be found on the back of your insurance card.

Unnecessary visits to hospital emergency departments place great strain on hospitals and the frontline healthcare workers who continue to bravely battle the pandemic. Such visits can also cause a delay in care for patients experiencing a true medical crisis and contribute to the depletion of finite resources including medical staff, testing kits, personal protective equipment, and therapeutic treatments.

“The best defense against serious illness and hospitalization from COVID-19 is to get vaccinated. If you have not gotten vaccinated or boosted and are eligible, please do so now. Do it for yourself, your

family, and your community, including the health care workers we depend on to be there when we truly need emergency care,” said Dr. David Ghilarducci, Santa Cruz County Deputy Health Officer.

Santa Cruz County COVID-19 cases have increased by 121% in the last 14 days. The case rate, test positivity rate and the R effective number (how fast COVID is spreading the community) all indicate a winter surge. The peak of this latest surge may not arrive for several weeks making it likely that its true impact on public health and the health care delivery system is yet to be fully felt.

Vaccines offer strong protection against illness from COVID-19. And for those who contract a breakthrough case of the virus after being vaccinated, the vaccine reduces the risk of serious illness that leads to hospitalization or death. For local information on COVID-19 including on where to get vaccinated or tested go to www.santacruzhealth.org/coronavirus or call (831) 454-4242 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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