

## Some Bay Area Health Officials Urge Employers to Consider Employee Vaccine Requirements

Health officials in Santa Clara, Contra Costa and San Francisco counties issued the plea as COVID-19 cases continue to increase across the region  
*By [Bay City News](#) • Published July 22, 2021 • Updated on July 22, 2021 at 11:37 pm*

Health officials in Santa Clara, Contra Costa and San Francisco counties urged local employers Thursday to consider requiring their employees to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

The health officials issued the plea as COVID-19 cases continue to increase across the region, the overwhelming majority of which have been among unvaccinated people, and the more contagious delta variant has become more prevalent.

"Our current surge is really being driven by unvaccinated, working-age adults, mostly in the 20- to 50-year-old age range," Contra Costa County Public Health Officer Dr. Chris Farnitano said Thursday during a briefing with health officials from the other two counties.

Farnitano added that while employers have an obligation to protect their workers' health and safety, vaccine requirements would also protect customers and reduce the lost productivity when an employee is sick, potentially for weeks or months at a time.

The health officers also encouraged employers to go beyond the state's workplace safety standards for COVID-19 by requiring employees who resist getting vaccinated to test weekly for the virus regardless of whether they show symptoms.

Unvaccinated employees are already required by the state's workplace safety agency to wear a mask when working indoors.

"The workplace that has 100 percent vaccinated employees is a very, very low risk for COVID," Farnitano said.

Santa Clara County Deputy Health Officer Dr. George Han noted that requirements for vaccination have already been upheld in court and potential litigation should not give employers pause.

"This is something that even the federal government and state government have resources available to help employers who would like to require vaccination of their workforce," Han said.

Walnut Creek Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Bob Linscheid said the business community supported employers requiring their employees to get vaccinated and argued it's crucial to businesses remaining open and keeping both workers and customers safe.

"We've been very involved in business reopening here in Walnut Creek and this entire region," Linscheid said. "The only thing that's really impacted us negatively is the unvaccinated, so it's incumbent upon us, if we're going to be healthy and stay open, to get vaccinated."

Thursday's encouragement from the three counties came less than a week after health officers in 10 of the 11 counties in the greater Bay Area encouraged their residents, regardless of their vaccination status, to resume wearing a mask in indoor shared spaces like grocery and retail stores and movie theaters.

The only Bay Area county that has yet to formally encourage residents to resume masking indoors is Solano County, which neighbors Contra Costa County.

The health officers noted that they expect other Bay Area jurisdictions to issue similar encouragement for employee vaccination in the coming days.

Officials from the three counties said they don't have plans, for now, to reissue a mask mandate or require vaccination for employees and expressed optimism that major employers would take steps to ensure their employees are vaccinated.

"There are employers that are doing this," San Francisco Acting Health Officer Dr. Naveena Bobba said. "In San Francisco specifically, the two largest employers -- UCSF and the city and county of San Francisco -- have moved forward without a health officer order," to require employees to get vaccinated.

"I view this as one of our tools that we have not yet fully employed yet, so this certainly could be a step in the right direction," Han said. "We'll need to see how the vaccination

rates go, and how the pandemic goes and that will kind of determine what may need to happen in the future."

Linscheid stopped short of saying the chamber would fully endorse a county-wide requirement for workers to get vaccinated, but said business leaders would at least consider it if all other options were exhausted to tamp down outbreaks among the unvaccinated.

"I think it's always better to do the carrot versus the stick," he said. "But if we're not making headway, if it's true this delta variant will reach its peak in October ... anything we could do to stave that off would be important.

Farnitano noted that unvaccinated people are orders of magnitude more likely than fully vaccinated people to both contract the virus and develop serious illness or die because of it.

In light of that, he said, the ultimatum for unvaccinated residents is clear.

"We know COVID is not going away," Farnitano said. "The choice now is either to get the vaccine or to get COVID."

Copyright BAYCN - Bay City News

###