

MONTEREY COUNTY



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January 28, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: COVID-19 Vaccination Requests

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, I write to respectfully request your immediate assistance on several critical issues related to the equitable supply and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to keep our residents safe, especially our farmworker community which has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

The Significance of Monterey County Agriculture. With an extensive farming history dating back to the 1850s, Monterey County currently grows over 150 specialty crops and exports nearly 400 billion pounds of produce from the Salinas Valley every year. Monterey County is one of the nation's top agricultural producers. The agricultural industry is the county's largest economic and employment sector, in 2018 generating \$11.7 billion and employing 63,921 individuals. Keeping the agricultural industry and its workers safe and productive is vital to ensure the food supply of the county, state, nation and world.

Impacts on the Monterey County Economy. COVID-19 infection rates among the agricultural workforce has had devastating effects, impacting far more than the County's agricultural industry. Due to high infection rates in the Salinas Valley, Monterey County largely has remained in the most restrictive tier of California's Blueprint for a Safer Economy and will likely remain there unless the agricultural workforce can quickly be vaccinated. Even though infection rates in the Monterey Peninsula were significantly lower, the County's categorization in the most restrictive Purple Tier and later shelter-in-place resulted in an estimated \$1.8 billion loss to the County's hospitality industry, thousands of lost jobs and business closures.

Concerns in Preparation for the Agricultural Season. Farmworkers are the fulcrum of the food chain. Over the past months it has become clear that our County's infection rates are the highest among the agricultural workforce and their family members. Ensuring the health of agricultural workers is of paramount importance to ensure the health of all county residents.

- **New York Times Article.** Starting in March we expect a large influx of seasonal farmworkers coming to the Salinas Valley from Yuma, Arizona to work in our agricultural industry. According to a January 22, 2021 [New York Times](#) article, "... the Yuma area has identified coronavirus cases at a higher rate than any other U.S. region." The report further states "Arizona has seen among the highest increases in newly reported deaths of any state over the past two weeks."

- **U.C. San Francisco Study.** According to a new [U.C. San Francisco Study](#), *“Latino Californians experienced a 36% increase in mortality during the pandemic (RR=1.36; 95% PI: 1.29–1.44), with a 59% increase among Latino food/agriculture workers (RR=1.59; 95% PI: 1.47–1.75).”* The report concludes that, *“Certain occupational sectors have been associated with high excess mortality during the pandemic, particularly among racial and ethnic groups also disproportionately affected by COVID-19. In-person essential work is a likely venue of transmission of coronavirus infection and must be addressed through strict enforcement of health orders in workplace settings and protection of in-person workers. Vaccine distribution prioritizing in-person essential workers will be important for reducing excess COVID mortality.”*

Inequities in Vaccine Allocation Impacting Monterey County. Monterey County has been placed at a distinct disadvantage compared to Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and San Luis Obispo counties and other counties around the state. These factors make the calculation for distribution to Monterey County patently unfair to County residents.

- **Multi-County Entities (MCEs).** Residents of counties with MCEs, such as those listed above, benefit from an influx of vaccines through MCEs (e.g. Kaiser, Common Spirit/Dignity, Sutter, etc.) **and** from the county’s allocation. While Monterey County only gets an allocation after the MCE cut has been taken off the top at the state level.
- **Allocations to State Prisons.** The same is true for allocations to our State Prison (e.g., Soledad State Prison).
- **Inequities in Population County.** Additionally, because the County’s seasonal agricultural workers are not included in the County’s population, there is no allocation for the estimated 35,000+ seasonal workers which migrate to the County starting in March.

Request for Special Allocation of Vaccine for Agricultural Workers. Monterey County is requesting a special allocation of vaccine for agricultural workers. The County, our hospital and health partners, and industry leaders from agriculture, hospitality and education all agree that it is imperative that we vaccinate the most at-risk for exposure who are our valued farmworkers, quickly and safely, for the wellbeing of the entire community.

Previously, the County requested that farmworkers be prioritized for receiving the COVID-19 vaccination in order to adequately keep our farmworkers safe. While this community was included in Phase 1B of the State’s initial vaccination plan, and the State is currently in that Phase, the County is not receiving an adequate amount of vaccine to quickly and effectively vaccinate this population. We request the State’s immediate assistance to supply vaccines for the current agricultural workforce population, and for the additional influx of migrant agricultural workers coming to our community starting in the next few weeks.

Data and Transparency. The County requests more transparency in the number of vaccine allocations per county to ensure we receive our fair and equitable share. It is important that the state and local health departments have a clear line of sight as to what is being allocated, received, and administered statewide so that we can identify when there are data inconsistencies and/or vaccine is not being administered in a timely manner. This will allow further investigation and identification of the challenges and will allow for more improvement of the system.

In addition, timely and accurate data supports local health departments in making key decisions at the local level. For example, because of delays with the federal pharmacy partnership, many long-term care and congregate living facilities have asked local health departments to step in and vaccinate their staff and residents. However, local health departments have no line of site as to the progress being made by CVS/Walgreens and/or how much vaccine is being distributed in their jurisdictions. In addition, multi-county entities (MCEs) have requested additional vaccine from local health departments and again, due to a lack of data transparency, it is difficult to assess whether they are being provided enough vaccine through the MCE process or whether the MCE’s allocation

process needs to be reevaluated. Prisons are also receiving vaccines that are counted as part of the overall County share of doses.

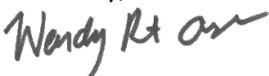
Monterey County is Ready with Plans, Capacity and Partnerships. The County stands ready to partner with the State to assist in the distribution and administration of the COVID-19 vaccine. We have detailed plans in place ([Monterey County Health Department Strategy for Implementing California's COVID-19 Vaccination Plan](#)) to achieve this including strong partnerships with local entities, hospitals and health care providers, large employers (e.g., The Pebble Beach Company) – and specifically in the agriculture community with the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, D'Arrigo and Taylor Farms. All of which are ready to stand-up vaccination sites prioritizing those with occupational risk exposure and residing in vulnerable communities as determined by the California Healthy Places Index. The County's plan can be easily scaled as we receive larger amounts of vaccine. Additionally, we request state and federal support to scale up mass vaccination sites, as have been coordinated in other areas of the State.

Local Support. The County has received overwhelming local support from our cities, hospitality industry, health care partners, and education community to assist the agriculture community as quickly and efficiently as possible. The Monterey County Board of Supervisors recently received letters from the Monterey County Hospitality Association, as well as from the Mayors of Carmel-by-the-Sea, Del Rey Oaks, Marina, Monterey, Pacific Grove, Salinas, Sand City, and Seaside urging COVID-19 testing and vaccinations for the agriculture community.

Ready to Partner with the State. The County stands ready to partner with the State and other local entities to administer COVID-19 vaccines, but in order to do so, we need 1) an adequate vaccine supply; 2) an equitable distribution process across the state; 3) data and transparency about vaccine distributions; and 4) vaccine prioritization for the agricultural workforce.

On behalf of the County of Monterey, we appreciate your consideration of our requests and look forward to working together to keep our communities safe. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Senior Policy Advisor, Ashley Walker of Nossaman LLP at 916-442-8888.

Sincerely,



Wendy Root Askew
Chair, Board of Supervisors

CC: Hon. Anna Caballero, 12th Senate District
Hon. John Laird, 17th Senate District
Hon. Robert Rivas, 30th Assembly District
Hon. Mark Stone, 29th Assembly District
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
Rural Counties Representative of California (RCRC)