

County of Santa Clara

Office of the County Executive



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DATE: August 30, 2021

TO: Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors

FROM: Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Vaccine Incentives

At the June 8, 2021 Board of Supervisors meeting (Item No. 14), Supervisors Ellenberg and Chavez requested an off agenda report relating to the status of incentive strategies to increase COVID-19 vaccinations, including an assessment of the potential to reimburse self-employed individuals and small business employees for short-term leave necessary to receive or recover from a COVID-19 vaccination. Additionally, at the August 17, 2021 Board meeting (Item No. 13), Supervisor Lee requested information about a recently launched vaccine incentive program in Contra Costa County and asked whether it is feasible for our County to adopt this approach. This report responds to both requests.

Status of Vaccine Incentive Strategies

Since early May, the County's vaccine outreach efforts have incorporated various incentives to encourage eligible residents to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations. Incentives have often been tailored to reach individuals from relatively under-vaccinated demographic groups. To encourage school-aged youth to get vaccinated, for example, the County Health System has held numerous vaccine clinics at school sites offering boba tea, agua fresca, paletas, fruit cups, gift cards, or other incentives. The County hosted multiple youth nights at Levi's stadium and has offered gift cards to soccer apparel stores at clinics held at youth soccer fields.

To reach younger Latinx residents, among many other strategies, the County created a six-week raffle program offering concert tickets for numerous Latinx musical acts, and coordinated with CDPH to offer free soccer tickets to a match between popular Mexican soccer clubs. To reach men, the County has raffled sports memorabilia, Golden State Warriors tickets, professional soccer tickets, and held special clinics with autograph sessions with San José Earthquakes' players. To reach young adults, the County has raffled comedy tickets and held several late night vaccine clinics offering gift cards to nearby restaurants. We've also worked with employers to encourage employer-based incentives, such as free lunches or entry into employer-sponsored raffles, at various worksite mobile vaccine clinics hosted by the County.

The County and its partners have also promoted vaccine incentives offered by other entities. From late May through late July, for example, our outreach teams actively marketed incentives offered by the State of California, particularly the \$50 virtual cash cards offered for individuals starting their vaccination process. Beginning this September, many Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans across the State will begin offering \$50 gift cards as well for their members to get vaccinated. We are coordinating with our local health plans and intend to promote these incentives once they are in place.

While many of the aforementioned incentives have been effective, recent experience in the field suggests that the utility of vaccination incentives may be diminishing. The population currently getting their first vaccine doses seem to be motivated by delta variant concerns or employer mandates rather than incentives. County Administration and the Public Health Department continue to look for opportunities to promote incentives; however, the value of creating new incentive programs may be outweighed by the cost of resources needed to set up the initiative.

Paid Leave Related to Vaccinations

California's 2021 COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave program, adopted pursuant to SB 95 and effective March 19, 2021, requires public and private employers to provide up to 80 hours of special COVID-19 related sick leave to their employees.¹ Workers can use this paid time off for vaccine appointments or to deal with symptoms following vaccination, among other eligible uses. This benefit, however, only applies to employers with 25 or more employees. Federally, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) entitles all employers with fewer than 500 employees, including very small employers, to federal tax credits if they offer up to 10 days of paid sick leave to their employees in order to get the vaccine or deal with vaccine-related symptoms. While this is a significant incentive, it is not a requirement.

Given this gap in policies requiring paid vaccine leave for certain workers, and responding to the Board's request, the County asked our Community Health and Business Engagement Team (CHBET) partners to listen closely and engage residents to determine the extent to which concerns about lost wages from missed work are a barrier to vaccination. In recent months, this issue has not been coming up as a key obstacle. Earlier in the vaccine campaign, our CHBET Community Health Workers (CHWs) did occasionally hear concerns about missing work. But, availability of evening and weekend vaccine clinic hours, short wait times, and the broad availability of the vaccines in general appear to have been effective at reducing many access related obstacles.

The vaccine barriers we do continue to face are primarily those related to misinformation. Individuals still share concerns about the perceived impact of the vaccine on fertility or pregnancy. Some individuals who have had COVID-19 feel they are already protected and won't benefit from vaccination. Others share concerns that the vaccines were created too quickly, rumors of very bad side effects, religious objections, or a lack of trust in government. Our CHWs do their best to talk through these concerns at the individual level and share relevant facts and information. This approach has been effective in many cases, though certainly not all.

¹ Note: California's general paid sick leave law, the Healthy Places, Healthy Families Act of 2014, requires most employers, including very small employers to offer at least minimum hours of paid sick leave. This leave can be used for preventive care, such as receiving a vaccination.

Our outreach teams continue to talk with thousands of residents and workers in the community every week. While their experience hasn't indicated that fear of lost wages is a significant current obstacle to vaccination, it has revealed that lost wages due to the pandemic itself continue to be a major challenge for many families. In particular, our CHWs have encountered numerous residents in need of rental assistance related to financial impacts from COVID. Responding to this need and in coordination with our Office of Supportive Housing, our CHBET program has now fully incorporated rental assistance into our door to door and business outreach activities. In addition to vaccine outreach, our CHWs are now trained to educate community members about available local and state rent relief resources and to connect them with enrollment support for those programs.

Contra Costa County's Vaccine Referral Incentive Program

On August 11, Contra Costa County launched the Helping Hands Referral Program, an incentive strategy offering \$100 to individuals, non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, and other groups for each unvaccinated individual they refer to a vaccine appointment. This innovative approach is not dissimilar from some existing efforts in Santa Clara County. A fundamental component of the County's vaccine outreach strategy from the beginning has been to work with community-based organizations and leaders to assist with vaccine referrals. The County's raffle incentive program encouraged vaccinated community members to refer unvaccinated family members or friends to get their shot by offering raffle tickets to both parties. Also, in recent weeks our CHBET outreach teams have been asking vaccinated community members to encourage unvaccinated family members, neighbors, or friends to get their shot. More than 23,000 vaccinated community members have committed to take this action.

County staff have been in contact with Contra Costa County regarding their program. The program comes with some logistical complexity (e.g. one-time scheduling codes need to be developed and delivered to all potential referring individuals and agencies). In light of the other work underway through our HealthLink system (preparing for the scheduling complexity associated with booster shots, developing HealthLink workflows related to flu, preparing for vaccine expansion to the pediatric population, etc.), at this time, replicating the Helping Hands program is not feasible. However, Administration will continue to monitor Contra Costa's experience and adapt if needed.

cc: Miguel Marquez, Chief Operating Officer
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