

Denise Lai

Letter to City of Alameda Mayor, Vice Mayor, City Council and Manager

July 7, 2020

RE: COVID-19

Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor, City Council Members, and City Manager:

Our island with her onshore breezes from the bay may be a protecting factor for us. But our county has the highest number of COVID-19 cases and the second-highest number of COVID-19 deaths in the SF Bay Area. The protective benefits of our location can only thwart the advancement of this highly contagious virus into our city for so long.

As noted in the city's letter to the public, COVID-19 cases nearly doubled in our city last month.

From July 2 to July 6, the county C19 increase in daily cases was 8% while it was 11% for our city. While we have enjoyed low numbers, today our city's C19 daily case rate is increasing faster than the county's daily rate.

The exponential growth of this virus can happen in a blink of an eye. With the 107 cases noted yesterday in our city, that can double in 3 days. And more than double when the impact of the 4th of July weekend hits later this week and next.

Now is the time to act to effectively blunt this virus in our city.

While seniors are doing a better job than all other age-groups in adapting their own behavior to protect themselves from Covid-19, this disease is nothing to ignore for the 18 to 60 year old age group as the disease can leave even the youngest and fittest with serious, lifetime organ damage that shortens the lifetime longevity sometimes to just 3 years. This is something we have the opportunity to stop. I would suggest, as our elected officials and our city manager in a city-strong municipal government, you have both the obligation and responsibility to do so.

While the ACPHD has done what they can, given their staffing issues, our city can do more. We know from other countries and cities what actually works. Some of those effective programs can easily be implemented in our city:

- Alameda needs a testing station. The AFD's community team can do this. Alameda Hospital can do this. I know Mayor Ashcraft said publicly two months ago that we have no relationship with Alameda Hospital, that they are owned by the county, yet we-the-people of Alameda city have been paying millions into our local hospital for decades; it seems we are due. Regardless, either the AFD community service team or the hospital can and should provide a testing station for Alamedans.
 - The more testing that can be done, the more information we have, the better we can blunt the virus.
 - UCSF offers free lab assistance in testing to city governments for the COVID-19. They could help in planning an organized sampling campaign for the city and the city should organize such a statistically valid sample test program to show the degree of infections and symptoms and distributions in the city. The two-test types would show the currently infected and those who have antibodies showing previous infections.
- Require masks at all times for those in public, outdoors and business and government indoors, and create a punitive fine for failures to wear a mask while on our city streets properly over both mouth and nose so that everyone will want to avoid the fine and will wear a mask.

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- Mandatory mask-wearing has been shown to cause a 90% decrease in C19 cases within 14 days. This is the single most important act our municipal government can do.
 - While there are places in our city where people can cycle/jog/walk and maintain 10 yards distance from others, this cannot be done on our city streets. Our homes are so close the streets as well, to truly protect vulnerable seniors and others, and to truly blunt this virus, masks should be worn at all times when on city streets and sidewalks. Perhaps we need a map showing which areas one can remove a mask when we are 10 yards away from others.
 - Singapore fines are \$10,000 for not wearing a mask. It works. No one dares not wear a mask. This is very effective.
- Require temperature taking before allowing anyone inside a building whether it's office or retail.
 - This is the single most effective way to identify people who are symptomatic and may not even know they are, to prevent them from spreading virus indoors
- Require sanitizing of the hands and shoes for each person prior to entering business and retail buildings:
 - Hand sanitizer, and or sinks with soap and water, to be used at door
 - Sanitizing mats that people must walk on prior to entering a building
- When any business, retail, or government staff is identified as C19 positive, require the facility that person was in to be immediately closed for 3 days and professionally sanitized, including air filtration systems, before reopening. And publicize the facility and location so that people know they may have been exposed and can take precautionary measures.
- Close Crown Beach to those not using the water and create a punitive fine those who violate this order. Allow people to walk across the beach to the water, but not stop on the beach. Work with EBRPD, our city's beach partner, to accomplish this. This alone will stop much of the viral community spread as fewer non-residents visit our shores.
- Tracing and quarantines
 - Right now, it's important to hit this virus with a hammer or else it will take more lives and permanently damage more Alamedans. But our cases are still low enough that tracing and quarantines would be highly effective as well. To trace the contacts of 107 cases is a big job, but this is feasible and it doesn't seem to be something ACPHD is doing effectively.
 - Tracing and quarantines can be a City order for those cases within our city.
 - If the AFD community service team were conducting the testing site, they could also carry out the tracing and quarantine orders. And there are plenty of free online classes to learn to trace as well; Alamedans would be happy to take those courses and volunteer to help trace. Please consider this!
- In other countries, they sanitize the cities overnight while everyone is required to be indoors. In our city, you've recently begun street sweeping again and, as you know, our street sweepers do not use water. Rather, they dry sweep creating massive clouds of dust—which contains bacteria and viruses—into the air over our homes and cars and even our bodies if we're unlucky to be out walking when the street sweeper drives by. This seems to be an added risk factor for spreading the virus that we do not need. Either include water in the street sweeping with some kind of antiseptic or cease street sweeping altogether until the pandemic is over. This is a very, very important point: for the city to blunt the virus, street sweeping as it's typically done must cease.

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I'm sure there are many more steps we as a city can take, and that means you as our city leaders and city manager must bite the bullet on this, make the hard decisions, educate residents about why, and lead a change in our culture so that everyone will respect stringent city orders and abide by them, knowing they are for everyone's benefit. No matter how much flack you get from the Antimas (anti-masks), this is the right thing to do to save lives and save our local economy both.

Until now, we thought the state and county orders were sufficient. Clearly they are not. It's been 4 months and the only thing that has blunted the virus has been people sheltering in place. The data on seniors continuing to shelter in place evidences this as well. Now that we must open, now that we can no longer tolerate sheltering in place after 4 months!, we need our municipal government to step up and do what's needed. Let's get our city on the right track!

I would also urge you to work with our county supervisors to demand they immediately hire a) a competent director for ACPHD who can handle leading a county public health agency during a epidemic [there's been no one competent to this position since the last director left] and b) a new medical director with an epidemiology background. Our city would fare better if our ACPHD were better run, provided better Orders, and most definitely would fare better if our city manager followed the ACPHD Orders, ensured widespread adoption of them, and created our own city orders that exceed county and state.

I look forward to seeing clearly defined programs that will lead our city in a pandemic response that fully blunts the virus, and leads the SF Bay Area in cities protecting their own residents.

Kindest regards,

Denise Lai