

SAFE RE-OPENING UPDATE

A safe & healthy workplace for City employees and the public



CITY OF
OAKLAND

#oaklandlovelife

August 20, 2021

Message from City Administrator Ed Reiskin And a personal message from a colleague on vaccinations

Dear Staff,

We are in tough times. As the COVID pandemic wears on, the whole country—and the world—is trying to figure out how to re-open schools, keep our economy open, and keep our communities healthy and safe. And just when we thought we saw the light at the end of this long COVID tunnel, with vaccinations driving down case rates earlier this summer, along came the delta variant, and a surge in cases and hospitalizations, to throw us a curveball.

Amidst the uncertainty, there are a few things we know for sure: 1) employee safety is our north star, our highest priority, and 2) the steps we have collectively taken— [like getting vaccinated](#), wearing masks, washing our hands, [getting regularly tested](#), and maintaining physical distance and small work groups to the extent possible—have kept workplace exposure to a minimum. By keeping each other and ourselves healthy – which by extension helps keep our families and friends healthy – we can meet our number one objective, which is to deliver services to our Oakland community.

In an abundance of caution, and in keeping with our commitment to lead based on science, guided by public health, I have decided to delay implementation of new telecommuting arrangements and extend the start of our phased expansion of services throughout the City, including re-opening Civic Center buildings to the public, until October 4 at the earliest.

In the meantime, we will continue to monitor cases and hospitalization rates, evaluate the impact of school re-openings on community transmission, and track evolving guidance from public health authorities, including the CDC, California Department of Public Health, CalOSHA, and the Alameda County Public Health Department.

The City of Oakland remains committed to reopening all City facilities to the public as soon as possible. For those of you working remotely who do want to return to the office, please talk with your supervisor to discuss those arrangements.

I acknowledge the toll this pandemic has taken. It's been a long journey, and you have risen to meet the challenge. Whether you have been coming to work in person to deliver critical front-line services to our community or you have been working remotely to minimize exposure in buildings and keep workplace transmission almost non-existent, thank you. You have been shining examples of public service.

Earlier this week, one of our City family members who works in Oakland Public Works, Al Lujan, asked if he could share a personal message with all of you. He said that he hoped that sharing his story might “encourage folks to get vaccinated, and to those that are already vaccinated, to get tested periodically, and continue to mask and practice safe distancing.” I was moved by his story, which you’ll find below.

Keep up the great work. We will get through this, and we’ll do it together.

Ed

Esteemed City of Oakland family,

On July 28, my older brother called to tell me that he had tested positive for Covid-19 and that he was being admitted to a hospital in Fullerton, CA. His breathing was labored and I could sense the fear in his voice. I was unsure if or when I’d speak to him again.

The following day, on a hunch, I decided to get tested at City Health Urgent Care adjacent to City Hall. Within an hour I received a call to inform me that I had a breakthrough infection for Covid-19 Delta Variant. I packed up my belongings, let the City’s Risk Management office know, and went home to quarantine for two weeks. In the following days flu-like symptoms appeared, but I continued to work from home until I couldn’t. Initially, I spent a few days getting my affairs in order as I had let them lapse. I wanted to make sure my daughter and partner would be taken care of. I looked around my house, which I just bought last October, and felt bad at whoever would have the monumental task of packing up or throwing out a lifetime of accumulation.

My brother’s wife texted me with periodic updates on his condition. She and two of their kids were also infected but had only moderate symptoms.

I was vaccinated in March of this year. Neither my brother nor his family were vaccinated. They cited mistrust, misinformation and the belief that since he worked alone repairing air conditioning units and she is a housewife that they would be safe from harm.

I’ve weighed the pros and cons of coming forward to share that I contracted Covid-19 despite being vaccinated. On the cons list was the dread that some anti-vaxxer would use the fact that the vaccinated can still become infected to argue “what’s the point of getting vaccinated?” The point is that my symptoms were bearable. The worst being the loneliness of seeing my partner drop off groceries to my porch from the window. The point is that breakthrough infections for folks who have been vaccinated are less than 1% of all Covid cases, per the CDC. The point is that I was not hospitalized, intubated or struggled to breathe.

I felt shame followed by guilt. Shame that I let my guard down, feeling invincible that I was vaccinated and that here in the Bay Area we were turning a corner. Guilt that I may have, unknowingly, helped spread the virus. I moved past that.

I felt anger and sadness at my brother and all the others who resist common sense and continue to fight against the very things that can help us come out of these unprecedented times. I am still working to move past that.

In the 90’s I volunteered and worked in hospice for over a decade during the AIDS pandemic in S.F. I remember the fear, anger and abandonment many folks living with and dying from HIV/AIDS experienced. And I remember the heroes who reached out to help one another, who

stood up, fought back and changed the discourse. Not victims, not pariahs. Beautiful human beings who happened to become infected.

A few days ago, I got a call from my brother to complain that the hospital cafeteria was charging him for food he didn't receive – a missing hard-boiled egg, only one pancake not two, etc. I knew he was feeling better. This Army veteran, husband, father and grandfather had another chance at life. On oxygen and disability but alive to tell the tale and to encourage folks to get the vaccine! He was discharged after 14 days.

Finally, I want to whole heartedly encourage those who have not been vaccinated to do so. It's free. It's easy and safe. Continue to mask indoors and social distance. Periodically get tested so you can protect your loved ones and strangers alike.

Thank you.

Al Lujan

Vaccination & Testing Resources

COVID vaccines are safe, free, and effective. Click [here](#) to find out where to get a vaccine and get answers to your questions.

Even if you're vaccinated, you should get tested on a regular basis, since the delta variant can cause breakthrough infections. Click here to find out the locations of [free community testing sites](#). You do not need a doctor's note or medical insurance to get tested.