

# WE ARE PUBLIC HEALTH

BY CALIFORNIA'S LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS

## OMICRON VARIANT INTENSIFIES LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH FIGHT AGAINST WINTER SURGE

Genomic sequencing conducted by local public health labs played a key role in identifying the first cases of the COVID-19

variant Omicron earlier this month. In anticipation of the variant reaching California, local public health departments across the state ramped up outreach and education efforts and doubled down on vaccine initiatives already planned to help stave off a winter surge.

The Los Angeles Department of Public Health immediately [opened a rapid COVID-19 testing site](#) at the Los Angeles International Airport as part of the county's emergency response to the Omicron variant. The Department also [took to their successful health podcast](#) to answer questions about COVID-19 vaccine safety, efficacy, and respond to common vaccine inquiries.

In Santa Barbara County, the public health department director did a [live interview](#) on News Channel 3-12 to provide crucial information on the importance of vaccine boosters, breaking information on the Omicron variant, and encouraged community members to get vaccinated and practice preventative measures to prevent a holiday surge. The interview was broadcast across Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo counties.

Humboldt County Department of Public Health [took swift action](#) to prioritize COVID-19 testing for international travelers in an attempt to curb the potential impact of the Omicron variant throughout Northern California.

In addition to local public health departments' ongoing COVID-19 response initiatives, the California Health and Human Services Agency and the California Department of Public Health [issued a joint statement](#) encouraging booster shots for 16- and 17- year olds in response to state and federal approvals.

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## FLU SEASON PROTECTION MEASURES ARE IN FULL SWING

Despite record lows last year and [this year](#), flu season continues to be a concern to state and local public health officials. Local public health departments up and down the state are promoting flu vaccines to community members to prevent infection.

In Siskiyou County, the department of public health [launched a mobile clinic](#) to bring basic health services to community members throughout the county's remote regions. The mobile clinic offers a variety of services, including flu and COVID-19 vaccines, and routine childhood vaccines.

The City of Long Beach [launched a mobile flu clinic](#) to provide free flu vaccines to reach community members throughout the city, and San Diego County [took to the news](#) to encourage community members to get their flu shots ahead of the holiday season and gatherings with family and friends.

San Diego County also [reports a variety of flu response activities](#) as part of its annual flu campaign that ranged from new website designs, social media toolkits, informational emails, news articles, blog posts and print materials. In addition, San Diego County collaborated with the San Diego Immunization Coalition to host the 17th annual Kick the Flu Summit to share best practices and flu vaccine promotion with clinics and social service providers.

To avoid contracting and spreading the flu virus, public health officials remind Californians to follow the same preventative measures implemented to address COVID-19: wash your hands thoroughly and often; use hand sanitizer; avoid contact with sick people; avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth; clean commonly touched surfaces; and stay home if you are sick.

## PUBLIC HEALTH TAKES ACTION ON STDs AND HIV/AIDS

CHEAC members joined advocates and organizations around the globe for World AIDS Day on December 1st to recognize those we have lost to HIV/AIDS and voice our commitment to continue efforts to reduce the impact of this disease and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) through education, prevention, detection, and treatment services.

The Fresno County Department of Public Health was [featured in this compelling NPR story](#) about the crucial role local public health has in keeping their communities safe and the extent they went to ensure access to STD treatment.

Tulare County Public Health Department joined community partners Altura Centers for Health and The Source LGBT+ to conduct STD prevention initiatives. The partnership conducts rapid testing for syphilis in rural communities and targeted populations that are disproportionately affected by the disease and provides educational resources on STD prevention and testing.

In Ventura County, the public health department developed creative solutions to continue delivering and providing HIV services during COVID-19. Telehealth services helped reduce the number of clients visiting health care facilities, thereby keeping community members safe. Through various new initiatives, Ventura County was able to increase prevention activities at local homeless encampments, expand their Syringe Exchange Replacement Program to two new sites, and provide grocery shopping and delivery services to some of their most vulnerable clients in need.

Solano County Department of Public Health [participated in a World AIDS Day](#) webinar on Equity and HIV prevention aimed at engaging African American community members facing distinct challenges. The webinar included a deep dive into the stigma associated with sexually transmitted infection, the challenges facing community members, and next steps to help bridge the gap in outreach, education, and treatment services.

The County of San Diego Public Health Services is expanding home testing for populations who are vulnerable to and disproportionately affected by STDs and HIV, with a focus on populations that experience barriers to accessing testing in healthcare settings. San Diego County recently relaunched their website for [Don't Think, Know](#), a home testing program for vaginal gonorrhea and chlamydia to address health disparities among communities of color. The county is also launching another home testing program that will offer full testing for sexually transmitted infections, including syphilis, three-site gonorrhea and chlamydia testing, and HIV called TakeMeHome.

In Orange County, the Health Care Agency's [Ending the HIV Epidemic Plan](#) guides the county's approach to reduce and eliminate new HIV infections and improve health outcomes among populations who are disproportionately impacted. Earlier this month, the Orange County Health Care Agency presented at the U.S. Conference on HIV/AIDS highlighting the partnership, community engagement, and needs assessment activities conducted in partnership with local community-based organizations. Orange County is known for their extensive work in HIV/AIDS-impacted communities, delivering presentations to regional collaboratives, providing access and education on the crucial antiviral medication PrEP, and conducting focus groups among at-risk populations.

