

Antibody testing starts in San Bernardino County as they prepare for recovery



San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors Chairman Curt Hagman speaks at a Wednesday, March 25, 2020, news conference on the coronavirus conditions in the county. (File photo by Will Lester, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin/SCNG)

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Antibody testing is now being done in San Bernardino County, as public health officials work toward recovering from weeks of shutdowns meant to slow the spread of the novel [coronavirus](#).

Arrowhead Regional Medical Center in Colton this week started testing patients' blood for antibodies that may show they have been previously infected with a coronavirus, San Bernardino County officials said during a Friday, May 1, news conference.

"It's very important people understand that this test does not mean you're immune and that you don't have to social distance and that you don't have to wear face coverings," said Dr. Rodney Borger. "This will give us a very good snap shot as far as how many people have been exposed in the community."

This type of testing, known as serology or antibody testing, is expected to start at public health testing locations as soon as next week, officials said.

Through Friday, May 1, [94 people have died and 2,113 people have tested positive](#) for COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

County officials are monitoring the [online dashboard tracking coronavirus](#) cases and deaths countywide following [Gov. Gavin Newsom's four-phase plan](#) to reopen the state. The first phase calls for more testing, tracing, personal protective equipment and hospital capacity.

County officials will ramp up its community testing over the next couple of weeks, Public Health Director Trudy Raymundo said.

“We know there’s still a huge gap in a lot of the testing we need to be doing,” Raymundo said. “What I want to be clear though, is that as we increase testing, we know we’re going to see an increase in positive cases. That’s simply to be expected.”

Public health officials are monitoring the average number of new cases per day and the percentage of confirmed patients, or the percentage of patients who actually test positive for the disease, Raymundo said. As of Friday, 10.3% of the nearly 20,598 people tested were positive.

“What we want to see is that average number stay flat,” Raymundo said. “That’s what we’re saying is ‘flattening the curve,’ that the average number of cases remains flat over an extended period of time.”

The county has been focusing its testing on people with symptoms, but this week started offering testing to those older than 65, healthcare workers and public safety personnel who do not have symptoms.

The county is planning to open testing to people showing symptoms other than the three main ones — cough, fever and shortness of breath, Raymundo said.

There are about 10 other minor symptoms, including headaches, tied to the disease, she said.

The disease has not affected people of all ages evenly. It has been harder on older residents, especially those living in nursing homes, Borger said.

In response, the county formed skilled nursing facility outreach and support teams. There are currently four teams, but a fifth will be added Monday, he said.

“This is an ongoing project and we’ve currently visited about 50 skilled nursing facilities and plan to visit the rest of them by the end of next week,” he said.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Curt Hagman said officials are preparing for phase two of Newsom's plan, which includes opening low-risk businesses. The county's coalition focused on the recovery effort is working on a playbook for how to open businesses in a safe manner. That plan is expected to be shared with supervisors during their Tuesday, May 5, meeting, Hagman said.

As part of a new campaign, businesses will get signs to place in their windows informing residents they're complying with rules for reopening, he said.

"There's no doubt this continues to be a hard time for our residents, especially our businesses and those who have lost their jobs," Hagman said. "We want to do everything in our part to get everybody back on their feet."