



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Friday, March 6, 2020

Contact: San Francisco Joint Information Center, 415-558-2712

**\*\*\* PRESS RELEASE \*\*\***

**SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
ANNOUNCES AGGRESSIVE RECOMMENDATIONS TO  
REDUCE THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**

*With two confirmed cases that indicate community spread, the time is now to take action to protect vulnerable populations and the public at large.*

*Recommendations for social distancing will disrupt the virus's path from person to person.*

**MEDIA AVAILABILITY: Dr. Grant Colfax will be available at 5:00 p.m. at the  
Department of Public Health, 101 Grove Street, Room 220**

**San Francisco, CA** — Mayor London N. Breed, the San Francisco Department of Public Health and the Department of Emergency Management today announced aggressive new recommendations for San Francisco to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the community. Dr. Grant Colfax will be available to speak with press at 5:00 p.m. at the Department of Public Health, 101 Grove Street, Room 220.

The City is taking swift action upon the confirmation yesterday of two COVID-19 cases among San Francisco residents that indicated community spread of the virus. Today's recommendations for social distancing are intended to disrupt the spread of the virus and protect community health. These are systemic as well as individual changes that will make a difference in people's lives. Although the recommendations will cause inconvenience, they are necessary and worthwhile to reduce the spread of the virus and interrupt its transmission from person to person.

"We have been preparing for this," said Mayor Breed. "These recommendations are informed by the best public health information available and guided by experts in our own health department. They mirror the actions being taken in many other municipalities and are informed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. These are important steps to protect our public health and are concrete things all of us can do to keep our community safe."

"Keeping the public safe and healthy is our most important responsibility," said Board of Supervisors President Norman Yee. "We must continue protect our seniors and other members of our vulnerable communities who are most at risk of being seriously harmed by this disease. Each of us must do our part to support and follow these recommendations so we can help mitigate the spread of COVID-19."

"As a public official who has been through a number of public health emergencies in the past, I am fully supportive of the Mayor and public health officials in taking the necessary precautions



to reduce transmissions of COVID-19,” said Supervisor Aaron Peskin. “While many may be concerned about the immediate impacts this may have on our local economy and our daily lives, taking these bold precautions now will pay off in the long term.”

City agencies including the Municipal Transportation Agency, Department of Human Resources, Office of Economic and Workforce Development, Human Services Agency and our partners at the San Francisco Unified School District are planning to start implementing these recommendations immediately.

We expect these measures to be in place for an **initial period of two weeks**, and we will continuously assess their impact to determine if they need to be adjusted. As the City prioritizes public health, we also acknowledge this will have economic and workforce impacts, particularly for smaller businesses, and the City will continue to work with state and federal partners to identify solutions to address those impacts.

Mayor Breed declared a local emergency on February 25<sup>th</sup> to boost San Francisco’s preparedness efforts. Steps taken since then include expanding the Emergency Operations Center and activating dozens of city Disaster Service Workers, increasing community outreach and public information, expanding outreach to vulnerable populations and the organizations that care for them, and starting testing for COVID-19 at the San Francisco Department of Public Health lab. It was that lab that confirmed the first two positive cases with a one-day turnaround time, a vast improvement from the reporting time from the CDC lab. This allowed us to take action more rapidly to protect public health.

Today’s recommendations for social distancing have a goal of reducing the occasions when large numbers of people come together and potentially are exposed to the virus that is circulating in our community. The recommendations protect the health of vulnerable populations, and ensure that essential public services, such as schools and transportation, are taking steps to protect the public.

“The virus needs people to spread. It jumps from person to person, so by reducing the opportunity for that to happen, we can effectively slow the spread,” said Dr. Grant Colfax, Director of Health. “Our chief concern is for vulnerable populations who are most at risk of getting very sick, or dying, if they get COVID-19. That is why we are recommending that people over 60, or with certain underlying health conditions, stay home as much as possible. For the general public, reducing the opportunity for exposure to the virus is the top priority. That means cutting back on the time you spend in groups and washing your hands consistently. Together, San Franciscans can unite in this effort and decrease the impact COVID-19 has on our community.”

“Protecting the health and safety of San Franciscans is our most important responsibility, and cancelling large gatherings will reduce the spread of COVID-19 and protect the most vulnerable in our community. Seniors and people with chronic illness and underlying medical conditions are protected when normally healthy people are not contributing to the spread of the virus,” said Mary Ellen Carroll, Executive Director, San Francisco Department of Emergency Management.



Today's recommendations will cause changes in behavior for systems and individuals. They are meant to disrupt normal social behavior, because the virus thrives under normal circumstances. Functions that are essential to an individual or their family, such as getting food, traveling to work, or providing for a sick family member, can be continued. This is an evolving situation and these recommendations are expected to change.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS AS OF MARCH 6**

### **1) Vulnerable Populations: Limit Outings**

- Vulnerable populations include people who are:
  - 60 years old and older.
  - People with certain health conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, kidney disease and weakened immune systems.
- For vulnerable populations, don't go to gatherings (of about 50 people or more) unless it is essential. If you can telecommute, you should. Avoid people who are sick.

### **2) Workplace and Businesses: Minimize Exposure**

- Suspend nonessential employee travel.
- Minimize the number of employees working within arm's length of one another, including minimizing or canceling large in-person meetings and conferences.
- Urge employees to stay home when they are sick and maximize flexibility in sick leave benefits.
- Do not require a doctor's note for employees who are sick.
- Consider use of telecommuting options.
- Some people need to be at work to provide essential services of great benefit to the community. They can take steps in their workplace to minimize risk.

### **3) Large Gatherings: Cancel Non-essential Events**

- Recommend cancelling or postponing large gatherings, such as concerts, sporting events, conventions or large community events.
- Do not attend any events or gatherings if sick.
- For events that aren't cancelled, we recommend:
  - Having hand washing capabilities, hand sanitizers and tissues available.
  - Frequently cleaning high touch surface areas like counter tops and hand rails.
  - Finding ways to create physical space to minimize close contact as much as possible.



**4) Schools: Safety First**

- If there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 at a school, DPH will work with the school and the district to determine the best measures including potential school closure.
- Do not go to school if sick.
- If you have a child with chronic health conditions, consult your doctor about school attendance.
- Equip all schools and classrooms with hand sanitizers and tissues.
- Recommend rescheduling or cancelling medium to large events that are not essential.
- Explore remote teaching and online options to continue learning.
- Schools should develop a plan for citywide school closures, and families should prepare for potential closures.

**5) Transit: Cleaning and Protection**

- Increase cleaning of vehicles and high touch surface areas.
- Provide hand washing/hand sanitizers and tissues in stations and on vehicles.

**6) Health Care Settings: Avoid as possible, protect the vulnerable**

- Long term care facilities must have a COVID-19 plan in accordance with DPH guidelines.
- Long term care facilities must screen all staff and visitors for illness and turn away those with symptoms.
- The general public should avoid going to medical settings such as hospitals, nursing homes and long-term care facilities, even if you are not ill.
- If you are ill, call your health care provider ahead of time, and you may be able to be served by phone.
- Do not visit emergency rooms unless it is essential.

**7) Everyone: Do your part**

The best way for all San Franciscans to reduce their risk of getting sick, as with seasonal colds or the flu, still applies to prevent COVID-19:

- Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Cover your cough or sneeze.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Try alternatives to shaking hands, like an elbow bump or wave.
- If you have recently returned from a country, state or region with ongoing COVID-19 infections, monitor your health and follow the instructions of public health officials.



- There is no recommendation to wear masks at this time to prevent yourself from getting sick.

You can also prepare for the possible disruption caused by an outbreak.

Preparedness actions include:

- Prepare to work from home if that is possible for your job, and your employer.
- Make sure you have a supply of all essential medications for your family.
- Prepare a child care plan if you or a care giver are sick.
- Make arrangements about how your family will manage a school closure.
- Plan for how you can care for a sick family member without getting sick yourself.
- Take care of each other and check in by phone with friends, family and neighbors that are vulnerable to serious illness or death if they get COVID-19.
- Keep common spaces clean to help maintain a healthy environment for you and others. Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned regularly with disinfecting sprays, wipes or common household cleaning products.

Keep up to date at [www.sfdph.org](http://www.sfdph.org), by calling 311, and by signing up for the City's new alert service for official updates: text COVID19SF to 888-777.

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