



Contra Costa County Ethical Framework for Vaccine Allocation

General Acute Care Hospitals Brief

12/11/2020

Committee Overview

As Contra Costa County prepares to receive initial supplies of COVID-19 vaccine, Contra Costa Health Services has convened an Ethical and Equitable Allocations Committee to ensure a fair, transparent, and evidence-based approach to access during the early stages of availability. Committee participants were chosen purposefully and intended to include stakeholders from across the county system with various backgrounds and interests. The Committee has been tasked to critically evaluate federal and state guidelines for vaccine allocation and give recommendations to support prioritization during the phased allocation process. These recommendations will be based on the best available and most up to date scientific information along with data trends specific for our unique community. The Committee understands the need for flexibility as evidence emerges and medical realities change throughout the phased distribution of COVID-19 vaccine.

Ethical Framework

The Contra Costa Ethical and Equitable Allocations Committee endorses the guidelines outlined by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Advisory Committee on Immunization practices (ACIP) and California Department of Public Health (CDPH). These guidelines will be adapted for use within all of Contra Costa County.

The ethical framework which has guided these recommendations are grounded in the fundamental commitment that the response to the current pandemic will pursue the good of all persons within Contra Costa County. To honor this commitment, the vaccine allocation response must promote the common good by balancing three main ethical objectives. Namely, to protect the population's health by maximizing benefit in the form of reducing mortality and serious morbidity, respect individuals and groups at highest risk of health disparities and protect against systemic inequality by promoting equity in access. Contra Costa County maintains that all persons are worthy of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, regardless of a persons' payer status, socioeconomic status, age, race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or disability. This framework, which is rooted in maximizing benefit through an equitable lens, will help guide decisions regarding allocation criteria and how to operationalize such decisions.





Vaccine Allocation within General Acute Care Hospitals

In accordance with Federal and State guidelines Contra Costa County recommends offering vaccines to front-line staff in high exposure settings during this first phase of allocation. High risk staffing groups include, but are not limited to, environmental service workers, staff involved in the preparation and delivery of food services within the hospital, respiratory therapists and staff who provide direct patient care to COVID positive patients in units such as the ER, ICU, OB and medical surgical floors. Vaccine administration within this sector protects those who are at highest risk of COVID-19 exposure and unable to comply with other mitigating public health strategies because of the nature of their work. Furthermore, vaccinating those involved in the delivery and maintenance of our health care system will help to ensure the system does not become overwhelmed, which will contribute to the prevention of excess morbidity and mortality from other causes. The ripple effect of this allocation strategy highlights the interconnectedness of our community; what is good for one is good for many.

If there are not enough doses of COVID-19 vaccine to reach all front-line workers in this current vaccine allocation phase, the Contra Costa Ethical and Equitable Allocations Committee recommends the following prioritization schema:

- Allocating based on staff persons place of residence in relation to the California Healthy Places Index (HPI). Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic significant differences in test positivity, hospitalizations and deaths have been observed among more and less advantaged neighborhoods, these differences often overlap with employment as essential workers. Consistent with the California Blueprint for a Safer Economy, the Committee recommends use of the HPI as a marker for health equity. The HPI uses census tract data as well as economic, social, education, transportation, housing, and environmental indicators to produce a composite measure of socioeconomic opportunity. Prioritizing staff groups living in the lowest scoring HPI quartiles follows the ethical framework outlined above to focus on equitable allocation.
- If further sub-prioritization is necessary, institutions may consider self-reported underlying medical conditions, both of individual staff members as well as those they live with or provide care for. Lastly, considerations may be given based on staff age - prioritizing those in older age groups. The Committee acknowledges that not all staff will be comfortable disclosing such information to employers and that considerations of age may unintentional favor higher paying staff groups. It is for these reasons that the Committee chose to move these criteria further down in the sub-prioritization schema.

To achieve fairness, justice and equity in vaccine distribution, all hospitals within Contra Costa County are encouraged to follow these same guidelines.





Conclusion

COVID-19 has caused unprecedented suffering and instability to all aspects of life within Contra Costa County and the world at large. Vaccination against this novel coronavirus and the disease that manifests itself offers the possibility of significantly reducing severe morbidity and mortality when used in conjunction with other public health strategies. Despite vaccines being distributed, it is still imperative that the community continue to adhere to hand washing, social distancing, masking, and other safe practices to decrease disease transmission. Contra Costa County is committed to the health and well-being of all persons and the hope is that this allocation model will honor that commitment. Our current crisis has pushed ourselves and our health system in ways unimaginable one year ago, and yet we as a community have and will continue to prevail.

