



**For immediate release
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Yuba-Sutter Health Officer prioritizes those 65 and older for Phase 1B vaccines

The expectation of a deadlier, more infectious variant of COVID-19 reaching the Yuba-Sutter area has prompted Bi-County Health Officer Dr. Phuong Luu to continue to prioritize COVID-19 vaccination for those 65 years and older, since nearly 8 out of 10 of those who have died locally due to COVID-19 were in that age range.

Dr. Luu said it is just a matter of time before the variant – which may be up to 30 percent deadlier than the current strain – begins spreading locally. The new strain of COVID-19 first appeared late last year in the UK and then in several California counties earlier this year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention projects it will become the dominant strain of COVID-19 in the U.S. by March 2021.

A CDC study found people age 65 to 74 were five times more likely than younger adults to be hospitalized because of COVID-19, and 90 times more likely to die from the virus.

“We know from data that those 65 years and older make up the overwhelming numbers of patients who are hospitalized and among those who die due to COVID-19,” Dr. Luu said. “The more infectious, more deadly UK variant will be here in a matter of several weeks, so we need to vaccinate these most vulnerable residents of our community to prevent illness and death as soon as possible. Any dilution of the vaccine efforts, however small away from this effort, will mean potentially more lives will be lost.”

“My decision by no means suggests there is less value or importance in any particular occupation, but rather puts the immediate focus on protecting as many lives as possible before returning our focus to frontline and essential sectors,” she said.

Dr. Steven Blair, Sutter North Medical Group President and CEO, said a focus on vaccinating those 65 and older makes sense from a scientific standpoint.

“We know that individuals aged 75 and older have the highest death rate, and those 65 and older are just behind them,” Dr. Blair said. “In addition to limiting the spread, we need to reduce the overall mortality by vaccinating the most vulnerable age groups first.”

Dr. Blair said it is currently a challenge to increase the number of people being vaccinated with each allocation of vaccines, as a large portion of vaccine doses delivered to the Yuba-Sutter have to be dedicated to the necessary second round of vaccinations. “In order to

vaccinate twice as many people in the coming weeks, we will have to deliver three or four times as many shots due to those returning for their second vaccine,” he said.

On Monday, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Phase 1B, Tier 1 would include 65 and older residents, as well as frontline workers in education and childcare, food and agriculture, and emergency services. County health officers have the authority to establish different priorities for the vaccination of groups within tiers based upon local conditions, so long as such changes are not less restrictive than priorities established by the state.

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