Rebecca Nanyonjo-Kemp, DrPH
Director

Salvador Sandoval, MD, MPH
Health Officer

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We know that many of you want our children to return to in-person learning as quickly and safely as possible. There are many components required to ensure the safe reopening of schools – most importantly is testing. The purpose of this letter is to ask for your help to open and keep our schools safe by testing.

Why should I get tested?

There are two reasons that people should get tested: possible infection and surveillance. People who have the symptoms of COVID-19 or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 should get tested for possible infection. It may seem counter intuitive for people who are healthy and have no known exposure to COVID-19 to get tested, but this an important part of disease control called surveillance testing. Surveillance testing requires being screened for COVID-19 regularly, typically once every 14 days. 14 days is the incubation period of COVID-19. That is, if you have been exposed to COVID-19 (even if you don't know you have) you can develop symptoms any time within 14 days of that exposure. Regular surveillance testing helps to find people who may have COVID-19, and be spreading it, without knowing they have it.

Lack of Testing Might Keep Schools from Opening

Without any vaccination or therapeutic medication, people should have a plan to test regularly. In Merced County, the number of residents getting tested for COVID-19 has been rapidly declining. When we don't meet or beat the State average number of tests per day, the State penalizes us. This penalty can force us to move back into the purple tier, which would mean that we cannot open any more schools. Right now, we would need to be conducting 689 tests a day to meet the State average, but we are only conducting 614 tests. **We only need an additional 75 tests a day to stop being penalized.**

How Can I Help?

We need everyone in Merced County to go get tested, regularly. You can get tested for free at our State sponsored sites. There is one in Merced City, and one in Los Banos. There are several other places to get tested, listed here: https://www.co.merced.ca.us/3436/Testing-Locations

Vicki Jones, MPA, REHS
Environmental Health Division Director

Jessica Montoya-Juarez, MS
Assistant Public Health Director

Yadira Vazquez, MBA
Assistant Public Health Director

James Clark, MICP, MHOAC
EMS Administrator

260 E. 15th Street, Merced, CA 95341 | Main: (209) 381-1200 | Environmental Health: (209) 381-1100 | www.countyofmerced.com/health

Here's how to use the two state test sites:

	Merced City Optum Serve	Los Banos Verily
When?	Monday-Friday, 7AM-12PM and 1PM to 7PM	Tuesday and Thursday, 8AM-12PM
Where?	Merced County Fairgrounds 900 Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. Merced, CA	Los Banos Fairgrounds 403 F St. Los Banos, CA
How?	1. Go to www.lhi.care/covidtesting 2. Select California from the drop down location menu (top left) and click "get started" 3. Fill out registration and get Patient ID (save this in a text, you'll need it at the site). If you don't have insurance, no problem! Just leave that blank. 4. Go to the fairgrounds anytime between 7am and 7pm, except 12-1. You'll be able to walk in with the patient ID. Typically it takes 5 minutes on site.	1. Go to www.projectbaseline.com/study/covid-19 2. Select "Get Started" 3. Register for an appointment. If you don't have insurance, no problem! Just leave that blank. 4. Attend your scheduled appointment. The site is drive-thru, and you will remain in your car.

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Merced County Department of Public Health