

ALAMEDA COUNTY  
**HEALTH CARE SERVICES**

AGENCY

COLLEEN CHAWLA, Director



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July 7, 2020

**Sent via email**

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor of the State of California  
1303-10th Street, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dr. Mark Ghaly  
Director, California Health and Human Services Agency  
1600 Ninth Street, Room 460  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dr. Sonia Y. Angell  
State Public Health Officer and Director California Department of Public Health  
P.O. Box 997377, MS 0500  
Sacramento, CA 95899-7377

Re: Requesting clarification of risk associated with zoos

Dear Governor Newsom, Dr. Ghaly, and Dr. Angell,

Thank you for your leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic and your commitment to protecting Californians. We recognize that you must make difficult decisions about how and when to safely reopen industries, and we appreciate the need to balance the public's health and safety with the social, economic and emotional needs of our communities.

Alameda County has taken a cautious and measured approach to reopening during the pandemic. We favor allowing lower-risk outdoor activities over higher-risk indoor activities wherever possible, and are puzzled by the State's classification of zoos in the same category as indoor museums. We respectfully request clarification about the State's rationale and urge you to consider grouping zoos with outdoor museums.

Our county is home to the Oakland Zoo, which is primarily an outdoor facility, similar in many ways to public parks, botanical gardens, arboreta, outdoor museums, or historic sites. After reviewing the State's COVID-19 Industry Guidance for Museums, Galleries, Zoos, and Aquariums, and the State's COVID-19 Industry Guidance for Outdoor Museum, we believe the Oakland Zoo is more closely related to outdoor museums than indoor museums, galleries, and aquariums.

Governor Newsom, Dr. Ghaly, Dr. Angell  
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Per the Oakland Zoo's proposed Workplace Specific Plan for reopening, they would close playgrounds and indoor spaces; eliminate access to interactive and interpretive displays; reduce and control attendance; require face coverings; suspend shows, presentations, or demonstrations; provide accessible hand sanitizing stations; increase the frequency of sanitation and disinfection of high-touch surfaces in accordance with CDC, local, and State guidelines; and implement physical distancing measures throughout the zoo.

The Alameda County Health Care Services Agency seeks to promote the mental health and well-being of our residents during this pandemic. With regional and state parks at risk of becoming overcrowded, the Oakland Zoo provides an additional outdoor option for residents to visit, especially those with children. With appropriate physical distancing and face covering, access to outdoor space areas such as parks and zoos is beneficial for community health. We ask that you please reconsider the classification of zoos and include them in the outdoor museum category.

We are happy to answer questions or provide further information. Thank you once again for your steady and health-forward leadership, and we look forward to our continued partnership.

Sincerely,



Colleen Chawla  
Director

cc: Board of Supervisors, Alameda County  
County Administrator, Alameda County