

# MERCED SUN-STAR

---

## Planada hosts first COVID vaccination clinic for Merced County farm, agriculture workers

February 26, 2021

By: Chiara Elena Romero

Hundreds of cars lined up on a rough road next to Planada's Bear Creek Apartments Thursday afternoon, the site of the first mobile COVID vaccination clinic for Merced County ag and farm workers.

A guitarist dressed in traditional Mariachi attire lifted the spirits of those in attendance, as registered nurses from Dignity Health and San Joaquin Drug administered 400 doses of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

For Jose Gonzalez, Planada Elementary School District superintendent, Thursday's clinic was an important milestone in the mission to bring the virus under control.



Registered Nurse Caren Col-Hamm administers a COVID-19 vaccine to a patient at the Bear Creek Apartments in Planada, Calif., on Thursday, Feb. 25, 2021. According to Planada Elementary School District Superintendent Jose Gonzalez, the district partnered with Dr. Sima Asadi to administer about 300 vaccines to residents involved in the agriculture and food industry.

"If we can test folks and keep asymptomatic students and staff away from the workplace, if we can vaccinate, and continue that proper hygiene of wearing their mask, watching their distance, and washing their hands — we will defeat this virus," Gonzalez said.

Thursday's clinic was made possible by Planada Elementary School District, San Joaquin Drug, Self Help Enterprises (the complex owner) and Merced pediatrician Dr. Sima Asadi.

Gonzalez explained that having enough vaccines for those essential workers was the greatest challenge for organizing the clinic, as there were only 300 vaccines available.

Thankfully San Joaquin Drug Store, which has served the Planada community for years, provided enough doses so all who attended were vaccinated.

The partner organizations were important because they are familiar with the local community, Gonzalez said. That's key because some in Hispanic and communities of color nationwide have expressed concerns about the vaccines.

“We are kind of a hub for the community, so the communication coming from us — the trust factor is there,” Gonzalez said.

Caren Col-Hamm, a registered nurse for Dignity Health, was happy to vaccinate folks Thursday. Some attendees asked about vaccine side effects. Those who received a shot were asked to stay on site for 15 minutes, in case there were immediate side effects.

Gonzalez guarantees Planada Elementary School District will jump on the opportunity to administer vaccines again if the opportunity comes.

### **ANOTHER VACCINE CLINIC**

Merced Union High School District is partnering with Castle Family Health Centers to host a vaccine clinic for food workers and farmers at Buhach Colony High School from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 27.

However, after Saturday’s vaccine clinic for food and agriculture workers, Rodrigo Espinoza, Merced County District 1 supervisor, isn’t sure how soon the county can have another clinic for farmers and food workers.

Merced and other Valley counties in the past few weeks have complained about the number of vaccines coming from the state, saying it isn’t enough.

“We’d have to sit down and figure it out,” Espinoza said. “The vaccines have been distributed around the county so that’s helping out. We’re gonna have vaccinations around the county so that way farmers and teachers (can) all get their vaccines.”