



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

POST OFFICE BOX 962, 1080 Emeline Ave., SANTA CRUZ, CA 95061-0962
TELEPHONE: (831) 454-4000 FAX: (831) 454-4488 TDD: Call 711

Press Release

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Contact: Corinne Hyland

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Phone: (831) 566-4370

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY HEALTH OFFICER DR. GAIL NEWEL TO RETIRE

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY – Santa Cruz County Health Officer Dr. Gail Newel has announced her retirement after four years of exceptional service to the residents of Santa Cruz County. Newel’s final day will be June 23, 2023.

Appointed County Health Officer in July 2019, Dr. Newel served as a remarkable leader during the largest public health crisis in Santa Cruz County history. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Newel’s ability to communicate complex health information in a clear and relatable manner made her a trusted voice in the community, and she was a driving force for one of the most successful local public health responses of any health jurisdiction in California, and among the best in the nation.

“It has been a great privilege to serve my community during these challenging past few years. Many public health heroes supported me in my work, and I am indebted to each of them – thank you! In addition, I recognize the hard work and sacrifice of our community members, all of whom came together to protect the health of their family, friends, and neighbors.” Dr. Newel said. “Together we saved many lives and protected the health of our most vulnerable. I look forward to retiring here among you. See you at the beach!”

Santa Cruz County has among the highest COVID-19 vaccination rates (77.3 percent) in California, as well as one of the lowest death rates (100.7 per 100,000 cases, compared to 251.7 statewide). Among her honors, Dr. Newel was awarded the 2021 PEN/Berenson Courage Award (along with former Health Services Director Mimi Hall) for leadership during the pandemic.

“During her tenure with Santa Cruz County, Dr. Newel exemplified the spirit of public service through her courageous and principled leadership on behalf of County residents,” County Administrator Carlos Palacios said. “We will miss her guidance but wish her the best in her future endeavors.”

“Dr. Newel's remarkable career and contributions to public health have made her a trusted advocate and leader in her field,” Health Services Director Mónica Morales said. “Her unwavering commitment to improving the health and well-being of others continues to inspire and will make a lasting impact on the community.”

Dr. Newel's last public event as Santa Cruz County Health Officer will be a virtual presentation of the "State of the County's Health," held on June 15, 2023, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Dr. Newel will provide an update of the County's current health status followed by a moderated Q&A. To register for the event, please visit: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_07DIHs3XTcauPRsXwSZWag#/registration. A recording of the event will also be made available later at www.santacruzhealth.org.

Equity has been at the center of Dr. Newel's efforts throughout her four years as Santa Cruz County Health Officer, including reducing public health disparities. During her tenure, Dr. Newel spearheaded numerous initiatives aimed at promoting community health, preventing the spread of diseases, and improving access to healthcare services. She played a pivotal role in developing comprehensive strategies to combat major public health concerns such as the opioid crisis and infectious diseases, and engaged with experts, researchers, and stakeholders to gather insights and develop effective policies and interventions.

Among Dr. Newel's contributions to addressing the opioid crisis and promoting harm reduction practices were a significant expansion of access to Narcan (Naloxone). On May 10, 2023, she received a Letter of Appreciation from the County's Syringe Services Program Commission for her sustained and exemplary service.

Furthermore, on August 18, 2020, Newel helped declare racism a public health crisis in Santa Cruz County, leading to a Board of Supervisors resolution to incorporate educational efforts in all County departments to address racism, and a provision for the Health Services Agency and Human Services Department to join the Government Alliance on Race and Equity on behalf of the County.

Dr. Newel's celebrated career began in clinical practice for over 30 years in a variety of settings, as well as serving as clinical faculty with the UCSF training program and as Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She later served as Medical Director for Maternal Child and Adolescent Health in Fresno County's Department of Public Health and as San Benito County's Health Officer.

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