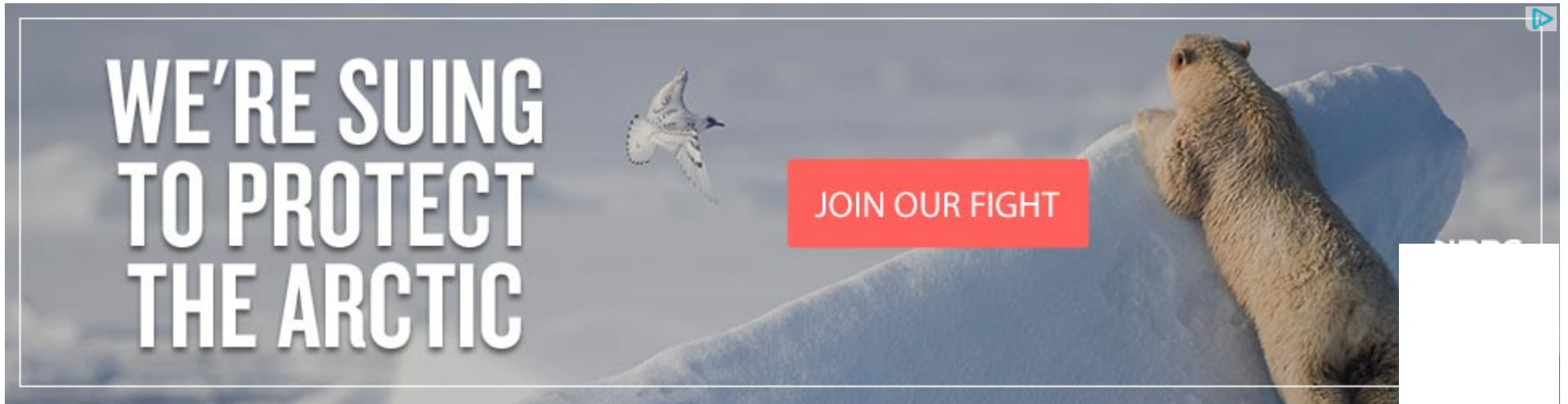


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CALIFORNIA

# At least 176 test positive for coronavirus at Ventura County farmworker housing complex

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Farmworkers pick strawberries in a field in Oxnard. (Mel Melcon / Los Angeles Times)

By KRISTI STURGILL

JUNE 30, 2020 | 10:28 PM

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An outbreak of COVID-19 has left at least 176 residents and staff members infected at a farm worker housing complex in Ventura County. Of the 216 tests administered to people affiliated with the facility, more than 60% returned positive.

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The infected residents — all men, mostly in their 20s and 30s — either have mild symptoms or are asymptomatic. None have been hospitalized for COVID-19, said Rigoberto Vargas, the Ventura County public health director.

The county had recorded a total of 2,926 [confirmed cases](#) as of Tuesday evening.

The outbreak at the farmworkers' housing complex occurred at Villa Las Brisas, which provides agriculture employers with temporary housing for their workers. The complex's dorm-style rooms each generally house up to nine people, Vargas said. Residents can also congregate in a common eating area, recreation room or barbecue area.

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reduce numbers in the dining hall.

The county also took steps to curtail the spread of the virus. Its agricultural commissioner allotted [1 million masks to farming sites](#). County officials sent fliers that described COVID-19 symptoms to farmworkers, and they wrote [guidelines employers could follow](#) to prevent spread. Physicians visited farms to answer questions about the virus and to educate workers about preventive techniques.

For several months, the measures worked: Farmworkers accounted for an average of only 2% of total positive cases, a county statement said.

But on June 17, two residents at Villa Las Brisas tested positive for the coronavirus. Vargas was unsure how the men had caught it.

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But then there were 12 new cases.

Soon, the 14 COVID-positive residents were moved to an off-site motel. But within a week, more farmworkers from three independent contractors reported COVID-19 symptoms, said a statement from Alejandro Castilla, housing program manager at Villa Las Brisas.

“Our property manager immediately contacted Ventura County health officials,” he said.

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That’s when the county conducted “the full, on-site testing of the entire 200” people, which yielded the high number of positive results, Vargas said.

Apart from the 14 residents who were moved to the motel, all other infected residents remain at the Villa Las Brisas housing complex. Health workers attend to sick residents directly in their rooms. All of the residents who tested negative for COVID-19 were provided alternative off-site housing.

The housing complex has implemented contact tracing, along with a review of health protocols, Castilla said, adding, “To date, the county has not required any changes to our safety or hygiene protocols.”

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Kristi Sturgill

Kristi Sturgill was a summer 2020 reporting intern on the L.A. Now and service journalism teams at the Los Angeles Times. She is from the Washington, D.C., area. Sturgill is a student at Duke University, where she studies journalism, French and political science. Previously, she has written for the Charlotte Observer, 9th Street Journal and Duke's student newspaper, the Chronicle.

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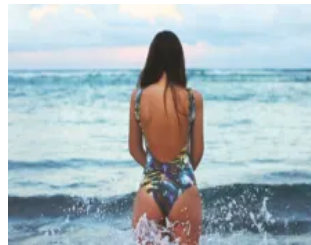
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confirmed

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As of August 30, 10:33 p.m. Pacific

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