

Weekly COVID-19 Update From EKA January 6, 2021

December was the worst month yet for the coronavirus, with one American dying about every 35 seconds. The US reported 6.3 million new infections in December, a more than 40% increase from November's cases. The December death toll also set a record with 77,572 deaths, more than 16,800 deaths above the previous monthly record set in April, a USA TODAY analysis of Johns Hopkins University data shows. The [Safer at Home](#) order has been in place in Los Angeles since March 19, 2020.

Previous EKA COVID-19 updates

Our previous COVID-19 updates can be found [here](#). Feel free to share our updates with friends and colleagues. We hope you find the information in the EKA updates and the questions they raise to be informative. If you have any COVID-19 government or communications questions, please reach out to any EKA team members.

California Stay-At-Home Order Extended

A stay-at-home order for Southern California was extended last week by state officials as the COVID surge continues to flood hospitals and strain ICU capacity. As expected, California Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly announced the stay-at-home Order and its restrictions on businesses and gatherings will stay in place for the 11-county Southern California region including Ventura County. The Order was also extended for the San Joaquin Valley. The two areas were the first in the state to be placed under the stay-at-home restrictions for an initial three-week period when capacity in intensive care units across each region dipped below 15%. State projections for the next four weeks showed no improvement, triggering the extended Order.

NATIONAL

Key Takeaways From The New Coronavirus Relief Bill For Employers And Small Business Owners

President Trump signed the long-awaited second [coronavirus stimulus package](#) – the Coronavirus Response And Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act – which Congress had approved last week, offering additional economic relief related to the coronavirus pandemic. Levenfeld Pearlstein LLC provided a very useful overview of the key takeaways for employers and small business owners:

FFCRA Leave Will Be Voluntary Beginning on January 1, 2021. The Act does not extend the paid leave requirements under the [Family First Coronavirus Response Act](#), which are set to expire on December 31, 2020. However, the associated tax credits have been extended through March 31, 2021. This means that employers are not required to provide leave under the FFCRA following January 1, but employers that choose to do so may still receive payroll tax credits for providing such leave. Employers should continue to follow the IRS's [documentation](#)

[requirements](#) required to support the tax credits. Employers who choose not to continue to provide FFCRA leave should carefully review state and local laws, as well as their own policies to determine whether employees are entitled to leave if an employee requests time off related to COVID-19.

Additional PPP funding and Second Round of PPP loans. For small business owners, the Act adds an additional \$267.5 billion in new [PPP funding](#) for first-time eligible borrowers. Borrowers that returned all or a portion of their PPP loan are permitted to reapply for the maximum loan amount. The Act also gives PPP borrowers that have experienced severe revenue reductions the chance to apply for a second PPP loan if they (1) have 300 or less employees; (2) have used or will use the full amount of their first PPP loan; and (3) can show a 25% gross revenue decline in any quarter of 2020 as compared to the same quarter in 2019. This second round of PPP loans allows additional expenses to be eligible for forgiveness, including worker protection equipment to meet health and safety guidelines, property damage, supplier costs, and operating costs such as cloud computing services, accounting expenses, and software.

Federal Unemployment Benefits Extended. The Act provides a \$300 per week increase in federal unemployment benefits through March 14, 2021. The Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, which expands coverage for gig workers, and the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, which provides federal unemployment benefits to individuals who have exhausted their regular state benefits, have also been extended.

SBA Extends Application Deadline for COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program

The SBA announced that the deadline to apply for a COVID-19 pandemic Economic Injury Disaster Loan has been extended to December 31, 2021. To date, SBA has approved \$197 billion in low-interest loans, which provide US small businesses, nonprofits, and agricultural businesses working capital funds. Economic Injury Disaster Loan applications will continue to be accepted through December 2021, pending the availability of funds. Loans are offered a 3.75% interest rate for small businesses and 2.75% for nonprofit organizations, a 30-year maturity, and an automatic deferment of one year before monthly payments begin. All eligible small businesses and nonprofits are encouraged to apply. Click here to learn [more](#).

FDA Opposes Halving Moderna Vaccine Doses

The Food and Drug Administration criticized an idea floated by one of the administration's top vaccine officials for stretching the limited number of Covid-19 vaccine doses, saying that a proposal for half-doses of the Moderna vaccine was "premature and not rooted solidly in the available science." The agency's statement, posted on its website Monday night, exposed a fissure between Trump administration officials about whether they can somehow economize vaccine supplies in order to inoculate more people quicker. Moderna and the Pfizer-BioNTech are the only companies so far whose vaccines are authorized for emergency use in the United States, and together they can deliver only enough doses to vaccinate 185 million Americans by the end of June.

EMPLOYER REMINDERS

Last month, California Occupational Safety and Health Administration issued 21 pages of COVID-19-related emergency rules, effective for up to six months. The new rules require employers to establish a written COVID-19 Prevention Program. Here's what employers must do now.

Communicate and train

- Inform employees about how COVID-19 is transmitted and how to limit transmission.
- Ask employees to report to the employer, without fear of reprisal, COVID-19 symptoms, possible COVID-19 exposure, and potential COVID-19 workplace hazards.
- Inform employees of their eligibility for COVID-19-related government benefits.
- Describe employer policies for accommodating employees with conditions that increase their risk of severe COVID-19 illness.
- Inform employees about access to COVID-19 testing.
- Inform those in the workplace about COVID-19 hazards.
- Train employees how to protect themselves against COVID-19 hazards.

Identify COVID-19 hazards

- Identify COVID-19 hazards with employee input.
- Conduct a comprehensive workplace-specific identification of all interactions, areas, etc., that could expose employees to COVID-19 hazards.
- Screen employees, ensuring that both screeners and employees use face coverings during any onsite screening and, if temperatures are measured, that non-contact thermometers are used.
- Establish policies for responding quickly to the information that employees have, or have been exposed to, COVID-19.
- For indoor workspaces, evaluate how to maximize outdoor air and increase the efficiency of air filtration systems.
- Have an effective policy of correcting unsafe or unhealthy workplace conditions.

Face coverings

- Provide face coverings and ensure they are worn properly. Face shields are not a replacement for face coverings but may be worn with face coverings.
- Face covering need not be worn by: an employee alone in a room; employees eating and drinking in the workplace with proper social distancing; employees who cannot wear face coverings due to physical or mental health conditions or who are hearing-impaired or communicating with the hearing-impaired; or by an employee while engaged in tasks which cannot be performed with a face covering.

Physical distancing and other control practices

- Where possible, separate all employees by at least six feet, except for momentary exposure when people are moving.
- Install cleanable partitions between employees not separated by at least six feet.
- Limit the sharing of regularly touched items, such as keyboard, phones, and pens.
- Evaluate the need for additional personal protective equipment, such as gloves and goggles, and provide it where needed.

Investigate and respond to COVID-19 cases

An employer faced with a "COVID-19 case" in the workplace, that is, a person connected to the workplace who has tested positive for COVID-19, is subject to a public health official's COVID-19-related Order to isolate, or who has died from COVID-19, must:

- Determine exactly when the individual was last present and, if possible, the date of the positive COVID-19 test or diagnosis and the first date of any symptoms.
- Determine where and with whom the COVID-19 case may have had contact in the workplace during the high-risk exposure period.
- Notify, within one business day, all employees and independent contractors who may have been exposed to the COVID-19 case, without disclosing the identity of the COVID-19 case.
- Offer free COVID-19 testing during working hours to all employees who may have been exposed to the COVID-19 case.
- Investigate whether workplace conditions may have increased the risk of COVID-19.

Reporting, recordkeeping, and access

- Report COVID-19 cases in the workplace to public health authorities where required by law.
- Immediately report to Cal-OSHA an employee's serious illness or death that occurs in the workplace or that is employment-related.
- Keep a written record of, and track, all COVID-19 cases "with the employee's name, contact information, occupation, location where the employee worked, the employee's last day at the workplace, and the date of a positive COVID-19 test." Make such records available to employees, with personal identifying information removed.

Exclude COVID-19 cases from workplace

- Exclude symptomatic COVID-19 cases from the workplace until: at least 24 hours have passed without a fever of 100.4 without the use of fever-reducing medication; COVID-19 symptoms have improved; and at least ten days have passed since the onset of symptoms.
- Exclude COVID-19 cases who tested positive but never developed symptoms for at least ten days after the date of specimen collection of their first positive COVID-19 test.

- Exclude employees with COVID-19 exposure from the workplace for 14 days after the last known exposure.
- An employer may not require a negative COVID-19 test for an employee to return to work.
- Employees excluded from the workplace who otherwise are able and available to work, such as asymptomatic COVID-19 cases, must continue to be paid and are entitled to all of their other rights and benefits "as if the employee had not been removed from their job. Employers may use employer-provided employee sick leave benefits for this purpose and consider benefit payments from public sources in determining how to maintain earnings, rights and benefits" as the law permits and as not covered by workers' compensation.
- An employee is not entitled to continued compensation and benefits (1) while an employee cannot work for reasons other than protecting other employees from COVID-19 transmission and (2) where the employer demonstrates the employee's COVID-19 exposure was not work related.

California's COVID-19 Response website can be found [here](#). California's statewide industry guidance to reduce risk can be found [here](#). Governor Newsom's executive orders can be found [here](#).

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Revised LA County Health Officer Order, Protocol for Social Distancing

The significant increases in COVID-19 cases, associated hospitalizations, and premature deaths across the United States, the State of California, and within Los Angeles County, have necessitated revisions to the Health Officer Order and two accompanying Appendices. These revisions include a mandatory quarantine order for those persons entering into Los Angeles County from outside the Southern California Region after non-essential travel. This message is to alert you to these three revised documents, which are posted on our [website](#) :

1. County Health Officer Order, Temporary Targeted Safer at Home Health Officer Order for Control of COVID-19: Tier 1 Substantial Surge Updated Response, dated December 30, 2020
2. Protocol for Social Distancing: Appendix A, dated December 29, 2020
3. Mandatory Directive on Travel: Appendix W, dated December 30, 2020

Revisions to the Health Officer Order include the following:

Except as provided in Appendix W, persons arriving in the County of Los Angeles from anywhere outside of the Southern California Region on or from non-essential travel, including returning County of Los Angeles residents, must self-quarantine for 10 days after arrival. Such persons must stay at home or another place of temporary shelter and away from contact with others, including those in one's household (unless they are also under quarantine), for a period of 10 days.

Quarantine may end after Day 10 if the traveler(s) never had any symptoms and they continue to monitor themselves for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days after arrival. If such quarantined person develops symptoms of or tests positive for COVID-19 during the quarantine period, they must isolate themselves as required by the [Health Officer's Order for Isolation](#). For purposes of this Revised Temporary Order, non-essential travel is defined as travel or transportation that is conducted mainly for tourism, recreation, or visitation purposes.

The Southern California Region (Region) is defined as the counties of Imperial, Inyo, Los Angeles, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura. The Order remains in effect for as long as the State Health Officer's Regional Stay at Home Order remains in effect in the Southern California Region.

All Travelers Must Quarantine for 10 Days

If you have traveled outside of LA County and recently returned, you may have had an exposure to COVID-19. The virus can take up to 14 days to incubate, and for many people the virus causes no illness or symptoms. If you go back to work, go shopping or go to any gatherings at any point over the next 10 days, you could easily pass on the virus to others. All it takes is one unfortunate encounter with an individual with COVID-19 for you to become infected, and sadly, for you to go on and infect others. Because of the likelihood of exposure to COVID-19 while traveling outside of L.A County, for everyone that traveled or is planning to travel back into LA County, [you must quarantine for 10 days](#). This is a mandatory requirement of the [new Health Officer Order](#). If you start to experience any symptoms or have a positive test, isolate for 10 days and until you are fever-free for 24 hours.

LA County Plans To Require \$5 Per Hour 'Hero Pay' For Grocery Workers

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors today voted in favor of drafting an ordinance that would require national grocery and drug retailers operating in unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County to pay frontline workers an additional \$5 per hour in "hero pay." Supervisors Hilda Solis and Holly Mitchell co-authored the motion calling for a temporary "urgency" ordinance that would apply to store chains that are publicly traded or have at least 300 employees nationwide and more than 10 employees per store." Supervisor Kathryn Barger abstained from the vote, which was 4-0. "As envisioned, the ordinance would cover grocery stores, convenience stores, liquor stores and other retail locations that sell food or beverage products and have a health permit as a food market retailer issued by the Department of Public Health. It may also include retail drug stores selling groceries. The board had questions of its own about the details of the ordinance, some of which went unanswered. Barger asked whether retailers in unincorporated areas would be required to pay the additional \$5 to workers in all their stores countywide. She also wondered whether workers, like pharmacists, who make considerably more than minimum wage, would receive the 'hero pay.' Those questions and others, including whether the ordinance could apply to stores in incorporated cities were left to be resolved by county lawyers responsible for drafting the motion. A draft is expected to be considered at the board's next regular meeting on January 26. If ultimately approved, the ordinance would be expected to stay in force for 120 days.

LA County Expands Rent Relief Program, Extends Eviction Moratorium

Anticipating Los Angeles County's fair share of \$25 billion in federal rent relief, the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday to extend and expand both a local rent relief program and eviction moratorium. Supervisors Hilda Solis and Janice Hahn co-authored a motion calling for more flexibility in the rent relief program, which will now also be extended for another year -- through December 31. Solis said the changes would expand eligibility and align the county's program with conditions that apply to new federal relief dollars. Under new rules, those tenants would no longer be prohibited from receiving help. In addition to changing the conditions for eligibility, the program will now raise the available assistance from \$7,500 to \$10,000 for eligible households making up to 50% of the average median income.

SACRAMENTO

Temporary Fee Relief Extension for 2021 Renewals

ABC has announced a 30-day extension on annual license renewal fees. ABC licensees paying annual renewal fees have been given a 30-day grace period. The announcement comes after Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order that will provide tax, regulatory, and licensing extensions for businesses. ABC's announcement encompasses ABC licensees whose license expiration date is covered in a table found on ABC's public website at [ABC Announces Temporary Fee Relief Extensions For 2021 Renewals](#)

Newsom to Propose \$4.5 Billion for Equitable Recovery for California's Businesses

Governor Newsom previewed his Equitable Recovery for California's Businesses and Jobs plan, the business and workforce recovery elements of his 2021-22 State Budget that will help California through the COVID-19 pandemic and advance an equitable, broad-based recovery. Watch the Governor provide a brief overview of his Equitable Recovery for California's Businesses and Jobs plan [here](#). Building on actions the state has taken to support California's businesses throughout the pandemic, including emergency aid and regulatory relief, these proposals double down on the Newsom Administration's commitment to rebuilding the economy, with investments across sectors and benefits for businesses of all sizes. Notably, the Budget proposes an immediate action to approve \$575 million more for California's small businesses, the backbone of the state's economy, as they work to adapt their operations amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This immediate action proposal is on top of the initial \$500 million allocated in partnership with the Legislature to the California Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant, bringing the total for California's small businesses to more than \$1 billion.

Newsom announces plan to encourage schools to resume in-person learning as soon as February

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced a \$2 billion proposal last week to encourage school districts to bring back elementary school students as soon as mid-February. The plan would use funds from the state's 2021-22 budget to support schools that reopen their campuses in February and March. Newsom emphasized the plan would use a phased-in approach, prioritizing the students that benefit most from in-person instruction. So as early as February, schools would be

encouraged to bring transitional kindergarten through sixth grade students, as well as students with special needs, back to campus. The state would then support schools in the hope of allowing all other students, Newsom said, to return to campus by early spring. The plan includes four aspects: funding to support safe reopenings, safety and mitigation measures for classrooms, hands-on oversight and assistance for schools, and transparency and accountability for families and school staff.

Business Groups Challenge New Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Standards

On December 1, new Cal/OSHA [Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (ETS) went into effect, creating a host of [new COVID-19 obligations for employers](#). Included in the ETS regulations are specific testing procedures, training and prevention protocols, and recordkeeping and reporting requirements. The ETS regulations include several controversial provisions, including stringent 14-day exclusion requirements for asymptomatic close contacts and a mandate that, with limited exceptions, employers "continue and maintain an employee's earnings, seniority, and all other employee rights and benefits" for employees excluded from the workplace under the ETS regulations. (On December 14, the Governor issued an [Executive Order](#) easing the 14-day exclusion mandate, such that most asymptomatic close contacts [may return after 10 days](#).) Predictably, the Cal/OSHA ETS regulations have now been challenged in court. On December 16, the National Retail Federation, National Federation of Independent Businesses, and three California employers [filed suit in state court in San Francisco](#). The plaintiffs assert that "California employers have established rigorous and science-driven safety measures, often at great expense," to make workplaces safe," and that the Cal/OSHA ETS regulations violate California law and are unconstitutional. The plaintiffs make several arguments, including:

- The ETS regulations were adopted without adequate public notice or hearing in violation of the California Administrative Procedure Act;
- By requiring employers to maintain earnings of excluded employees, the ETS regulations seek to regulate wages and paid leave in excess of Cal/OSHA's jurisdiction;
- Because the enhanced "outbreak" testing protocols are triggered by three cases in a 14-day period, regardless of whether the employer has 5 employees or 500 employees, the ETS regulations are arbitrary and capricious;
- The exclusion and pay requirements pose a threat to the viability of smaller employers;
- The ETS regulations were adopted contrary to internal staff findings that the regulations were unnecessary and unsupported by science; and
- the ETS regulations deprive employers of property without just compensation or due process.

A case management conference is set for May 19, 2021. However, as the complaint also requests a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction, expect the plaintiffs to file a motion in the near future seeking to enjoin enforcement of the challenged provisions while the case proceeds. Employers should continue to comply with the ETS regulations for the time being.

LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS

New Lawsuit By Essential Industries Alleges New CalOSHA Standards

A coalition of essential industries, including the agricultural industry and broader business community, filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles Superior Court detailing the detrimental impact the Newsom Administration's new Emergency Temporary Standards (ETS) will have on food security and vaccine distribution. The regulations mandated by the ETS create significant new obligations and liabilities for employers, and subject well-meaning California farmers and other businesses to additional enforcement actions and substantial penalties. The practical effect of these emergency standards is to shift the public health and economic costs of COVID-19 monitoring, investigation, compliance and remediation onto employers, all without any consideration of the financial damage inflicted on businesses and practical impact on food and vaccine distribution. To read the complaint filed today, [click here](#). To read an FAQ prepared by the plaintiffs, [click here](#)

9th Circuit Skeptical Of California Church Limits

A federal appeals court panel appears poised to find that Gov. Gavin Newsom's month's long coronavirus limits on houses of worship violate the religious freedom rights of Californians, but a majority of the judges on the case sounded unlikely Monday to immediately reverse tighter stay-at-home restrictions imposed last month due to a record surge in infections. As detailed in [Politico](#), At times during the hearing, three judges of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals seemed to spar with each other about aspects of the state's ban on indoor worship services.

WHAT WE'RE READING

From Costco And Target To TV Sitcom Sets, Los Angeles Workplaces Emerge As Likely Pathways For Coronavirus Spread

With Los Angeles County now a leading hot spot of America's coronavirus crisis, the statistics are hard to process. A person is dying every 10 minutes. And Mayor Eric Garcetti noted Sunday that a person is getting infected every six seconds. But one thing about the pandemic has not changed during the darkest phase: those who suffer most. For those with the means to stay home and the strength to avoid gatherings, COVID-19 has remained a relatively low risk. For people living in crowded conditions and who must work, it's become an even more mortal. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Second California Hospital Busted For Giving COVID-19 Vaccine To Relatives

A second California hospital [has been busted](#) for giving the Pfizer/BioNTech coronavirus vaccine to its employees' relatives — instead of using the doses for the elderly or frontline workers. Southern California Hospital allowed its workers to invite relatives to get vaccinated — just as another area hospital did last week, sparking criticism. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Omni Hotels Accepted Millions In PPP Funds But Didn't Pay Workers

Omni Hotels & Resorts, the international luxury hotel chain owned by billionaire Robert B. Rowling, is being accused of misusing millions of dollars in federal pandemic relief funds meant to keep workers on the payroll. Unite Here, a service workers' union with more than 300,000 members in North America, said several Omni hotels where it represents workers took Paycheck Protection Program loans but never paid hundreds of workers. To read the full story, click [here](#).

LAX Opens COVID-19 Testing Site With Lab, Providing Results in Just Hours

A COVID-19 rapid testing facility with an on-site lab that can produce results in 3-5 hours launches Thursday at the Los Angeles International Airport. The \$125 COVID-19 tests will be administered and processed at the airport, and LAWA officials called the purpose-built on-site lab "a first-of-its-kind for airports." The testing site and lab are located in a prefab container structure across the street from Terminal 6 on the Lower/Arrivals level, between parking structures 6 and 7. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Eleventh Circuit Finds SBA Can Deny Payment Protection Program Loans To Debtors In Bankruptcy

The Eleventh Circuit recently affirmed the U.S. Small Business Association's ("SBA") rule that makes bankruptcy debtors ineligible for a Payment Protection Program ("PPP") loan under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act ("CARES Act"). In its comprehensive opinion, the Eleventh Circuit determined that the SBA's rule is not an unreasonable interpretation of the CARES Act and is not arbitrary and capricious. The Eleventh Circuit joins the Fifth Circuit, which similarly held in June 2020 that a bankruptcy court exceeded its authority when it required the SBA to make a PPP loan available to a debtor in bankruptcy. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Spiraling COVID-19 Deaths Leave Morgues Overflowing And Funeral Homes Turning Away Grieving Families

A months-long surge of coronavirus cases in Los Angeles County is reaching its grim if inevitable zenith as deaths reach once-unthinkable levels. Single-day COVID-19 death records have been broken every day for the last three days of the year, reaching 291 on New Year's Eve. Hospital morgues are full and funeral homes are so overwhelmed they are turning away grieving families. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Small Mom-And-Pop Businesses That Took PPP Loans May Face A Surprise Tax Bomb

The Covid relief bill grants borrowers in the Paycheck Protection Program their wish: tax-free forgiveness of the loan, along with the ability to deduct covered expenses. Whether states will permit those write-offs, along with tax-free forgiveness, remains up in the air. That means businesses may still face surprise taxes on their state tax returns. Small businesses may decide to go on extension when they file their 2020 taxes next year. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Race to Vaccinate Millions in US off to Slow, Messy Start

The race to vaccinate millions of Americans is off to a slower, messier start than public health officials and leaders of the Trump administration's Operation Warp Speed had expected. To read the full story, click [here](#).

COVID-19 Dominates Annual List of Banished Words, Terms

Even as vaccines are being rolled out to battle coronavirus, wordsmiths at Lake Superior State University in Michigan's Upper Peninsula say they want to kick any trace of it from the English language. To read the full story, click [here](#).

As Covid Crisis Grows, Many California Businesses Flout The Rules

As the pandemic reaches new heights in California, many residents, tourists and business owners are doing the opposite of what's needed to slow the spread of coronavirus, experts say. They're defying stay-at-home rules, recently extended until hospitalizations subside, that ban dining, and nonessential retailers and services. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Trump Said CDC's COVID Tracker Is 'Fake News' And Agency Exaggerates Cases

President Donald Trump on Sunday said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — led by people he appointed himself — tracks coronavirus case and death rates inaccurately. The number of US cases and deaths "is far exaggerated," he said in a tweet Sunday, a claim that Dr. Anthony Fauci and other experts have disputed. It's far likelier that the CDC underexaggerates cases. Experts for months have said case and death toll rates are actually much higher than known. Trump's remarks come just as the number of COVID-19 deaths in the United States surpassed 350,000, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. To read the full story, click [here](#).

California Begins Vaccinating Inmates, But Not At Its Hardest-Hit Prisons

California's prison system, which has been exceptionally hard-hit by the coronavirus, has started vaccinating some inmates — but none so far at the 25 prisons that have been most overwhelmed by infections, including San Quentin, Avenal State Prison and the California Institution for Men. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Why Congress Ducked This Covid Legal Fight (for Now)

The leader of the US Senate, Republican Mitch McConnell, has warned that a forthcoming wave of litigation over Covid-19 will amount to a "second pandemic." That's the basis for a continuing effort in Congress to shield companies from lawsuits filed by workers and consumers who get sick. Though a liability shield ended up being dropped from the economic stimulus measure passed in the final days of 2020, the issue is not going away, and some states have moved to provide their own versions of legal immunity for businesses. To read the full story, click [here](#).

A Covid-19 Relief Fund Was Only For Black Residents. Then Came The Lawsuits.

Oregon earmarked \$62 million to explicitly benefit Black individuals and business owners. Now some of the money is in limbo after lawsuits alleging racial discrimination. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Superior Court judge denies motion to dismiss challenge of indefinite indoor fitness shutdown

The California Fitness Alliance (CFA) achieved a significant victory Wednesday as Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Mark Mooney denied the State of California's motion to dismiss the CFA's complaint, which challenges the indefinite shutdown of indoor fitness establishments. To read the full story, click [here](#).

From Costco And Target To TV Sitcom Sets, LA Workplaces Hit With Coronavirus Outbreaks

With Los Angeles County now a leading hot spot of America's coronavirus crisis, the statistics are hard to process. A person is dying every 10 minutes. And Mayor Eric Garcetti noted Sunday that a person was getting infected every six seconds. But one thing about the pandemic has not changed during the darkest phase: those who suffer most. For those with the means to stay home and the ability and determination to avoid gatherings, COVID-19 has remained a relatively low risk. For people living in crowded conditions and who must work, it's become an even more mortal threat. To read the full story, click [here](#).

UK Locked Down Again Amid Rollout of New Vaccine

Faced with an escalating coronavirus crisis, the United Kingdom on Monday imposed a new lockdown and also became the first nation in the world to use the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, an antidote that experts hope will become a centerpiece in the global fight against the pandemic. During an evening speech, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson ordered a new lockdown in England, telling people to not leave their homes unless they must for essential reasons. The lockdown also includes the closing of schools and universities. Similar measures are being put into effect in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, he said. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Newsom Vows to Speed Up Slow California Rollout of Covid Vaccine

Comparing the Covid-19 vaccination endeavor to a "military operation," California Governor Gavin Newsom said Monday he will press lawmakers for an additional \$300 million to jumpstart the state's lagging distribution efforts. With over 500,000 doses yet to be administered and millions more en route, Newsom promised the state will take a more aggressive approach in getting shots to residents. Along with the \$300 million request to be included in his upcoming budget proposal, Newsom said dental offices, drug stores and the National Guard will be used to speed up the vaccination process. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Are You Under Extreme Stress? You're Not Alone As Study Finds Spike In COVID-Related Psychological Distress

The coronavirus pandemic is creating a large spike in significant psychological distress, according to a study released Monday by a Santa Monica-based nonprofit global policy think tank. Findings from what the RAND Corp. characterizes as the first longitudinal study of psychological distress during the pandemic show that among a representative sample of Americans, more than 10% reported experiencing symptoms of significant psychological distress during April and May of 2020 — the same amount they reported experiencing over an entire year during a survey conducted a year earlier. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Officials Blast Anti-Maskers, Warn Worst Is Yet to Come in COVID Pandemic

Warning that the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic is yet to come, Los Angeles County officials lashed out Monday at anti-mask protesters and other groups challenging health orders — saying they only need to look at overwhelmed local hospitals to see the deadly consequences of the virus. To read the full story, click [here](#).

California Cases Jump To Over 70,000 In A Day As State Braces For Post-Holiday Surge. 'This Week Is Critical'

The record case count — 74,135 cases on Monday — came even as California continued to fumble its coronavirus vaccination efforts, reporting that only about a third of all doses sent to the state have been administered. About 450,000 people have been vaccinated so far. Meanwhile, the state over the weekend identified five more patients infected with a new, more contagious strain of the coronavirus, for a total of six cases, all in Southern California. Though infectious disease experts say the vaccine should work against the new strain, officials are worried that it's already circulating in the state and could intensify the ongoing surge and make it more difficult to get under control. Newsom said parts of the state ramped up enforcement of stay-at-home orders over Christmas and, in particular, New Year's Eve to prevent "superspreader" events and parties. State authorities visited more than 2,500 bars and restaurants, particularly in Los Angeles County, over December 31 and January 1, he said. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Just 1% Of Californians Immunized Amid Slow Vaccine Rollout

The state is trying to execute the massive immunization campaign "with a sense of urgency that is required of this moment and the urgency that people demand," but so far only about 1% of California's 40 million residents have been vaccinated, the Democratic Governor said. The 454,000 doses of vaccine that have been administered in California represent just a third of the more than nearly 1.3 million received in the state so far, according to the California Department of Public Health. Across the country, the pace of immunizations has gone slower than planned due to logistical hurdles and differing approaches across states and counties. On Monday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said nearly 4.6 million shots have been dispensed. To read the full story, click [here](#).

California's EDD Freezes Many People's Unemployment Benefits To Combat Fraud

California's Employment Development Department has suspended unemployment payments for numerous people because of fear of fraud. Many Californians who said they are legitimately unemployed flooded social media over the weekend with laments that they desperately need the benefits that they rely on for housing, food and other necessities. ... Even some elected representatives said they have not been able to reach EDD for answers about halted payments. The agency "is taking a sledgehammer approach instead of a scalpel approach to the fraud problem" by freezing so many accounts, said state Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, who has received at least 50 complaints in recent days from constituents whose accounts were frozen. To read the full story, click [here](#).

COVID Dangers Intensify: California Now In 'Deep Dark Part Of The Tunnel,' Top Health Official Says

Over the past seven days, an average of 37,845 COVID-19 cases have been reported each day. Over the next three weeks, another 6,286 Californians are projected to die from COVID-19, according to the state's epidemiological forecasts. US Army Corps of Engineers and state Emergency Medical Services staff have been deployed to hospitals to bolster their capacity to offer oxygen to patients with damaged lungs, Newsom said. The state is procuring more oxygen containers and also will adapt its 42 medical disaster support units to provide oxygen. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Covid-19 Aftermath Could Spell a 'Lost Decade' for Global Economy, World Bank Says

Even before Covid-19, the World Bank had lowered its projections for global growth in the 10 years that began in 2020. The pandemic is exacerbating that trend, raising the prospect of a "lost decade" ahead, the World Bank said Tuesday, as it also cut its forecasts for the coming year. The bank's semiannual Global Economic Prospects report attributes the long-term downgrade to lower trade and investment caused by uncertainty over the pandemic, along with disruptions in education that will hamper gains in labor productivity. "If history is any guide, unless there is substantial reform, we think the global economy is headed for a decade of disappointing growth outcomes," Ayhan Kose, the bank's acting vice president for equitable growth and financial institutions, said in an interview. To read the full story, click [here](#).

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