

Weekly COVID-19 Update From EKA January 13, 2021

The US lost more than 22,000 lives to COVID-19 last week, setting a record for the second week in a row, as new cases also hit a weekly high. The death toll in California reached 30,000. Public health experts have said no US state has so far come close to using up its federal allotments of vaccines, due in some instances to rigid rules sharply limiting who can be inoculated. 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.

Hazard Pay for Grocery and Pharmacy Workers

Frontline workers of certain large grocery and pharmacy retailers in Los Angeles County and other municipalities across the state may soon receive an additional \$4.00 to \$5.00 an hour in "hero pay" or "hazard pay" during the COVID-19 Pandemic. From the outset of the Pandemic, some grocery retailers offered an increase in hourly pay to employees, ranging from \$2.00 to \$4.00, as well as monthly bonuses. However, at some companies, the pay increases have lapsed.

Hazard Pay Ordinances

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted in favor of drafting an ordinance that would require a raise of \$5.00 an hour in "hero pay" for frontline workers of certain large grocery and pharmacy retailers during the Pandemic. The [motion](#), put forth by Supervisors Hilda Solis and Holly Mitchel, passed 4 to 1, with Supervisor Kathryn Barger abstaining from the vote. The motion asks the Acting County Counsel for Los Angeles County to draft an ordinance mandating the pay increase and to determine whether the ordinance could apply to incorporated Los Angeles County. The Board is expected to consider the draft ordinance at its next regular meeting on January 26, 2021. If approved, the ordinance is expected to remain in force for 120 days from its effective date. As envisioned, the ordinance will cover grocery stores, convenience stores, liquor stores, and other retail locations in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County 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 and retail locations selling groceries covered by the California Retail Food Code. The ordinance will only apply to corporations that are publicly traded or have at least 300 employees nationwide and more than 10 employees per store site.

Hazard Pay In Other California Municipalities

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' efforts mirror similar measures currently under consideration by both the Los Angeles and Long Beach City Councils, as well as the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

Long Beach

The Long Beach City Council [voted unanimously](#) on December 15, 2020 to [ask the City Attorney](#) to draft an urgency ordinance for consideration at the next City Council meeting to restore hazard pay to "frontline grocery workers" at a rate of \$4.00 per hour. The proposal exempts grocers with fewer than 300 employees nationally. If passed, the ordinance would go into effect immediately and expire after 120 days.

The City of Los Angeles

The Los Angeles City Council introduced a similar proposal on December 15, 2020 to ask the City Attorney's Office to draft an ordinance mandating a \$5.00 hourly wage increase for workers at grocery store chains that employ 300 or more workers nationwide. As envisioned, the ordinance would remain in effect as long as Los Angeles remains under the state's Purple, Red, or Orange levels of Community Disease Transmission for COVID-19 under State Health Orders. The motion is expected to be heard in the Council's Economic Development Committee early this year.

RESTRICTIONS

Find the status of activities in your County [here](#). Find detailed information on the different reopening tiers [here](#).

NATIONAL

IRS Reverses Position On Deductibility Of Paycheck Protection Program Loan Expenses

The CARES Act provides that PPP loans may be forgiven without causing the borrower to incur cancellation of debt income, but did not address whether business expenses could be deducted if paid for by PPP loan proceeds. On April 30, 2020, the IRS published [Notice 2020-32](#) clarifying that taxpayers whose PPP loans were forgiven could not deduct business expenses covered by such loan proceeds. As part of the end of the year COVID-19 relief and appropriations legislation signed into law on December 27, 2020, Congress expressly provided that taxpayers may treat expenses paid with PPP loan proceeds as ordinary and necessary business expenses reducing their overall gross income. The IRS subsequently issued new guidance ([Rev. Rul. 2021-2](#)), reversing its original position in Notice 2020-32.

New Grant Program For Live Venues, Cultural Institutions & Related Industries

Are you a theatrical producer, talent representative, venue promoter or do you operate a live venue, live performing arts organization, movie house or cultural institution and have been impacted by COVID-19? Register for SBA's webinar on **Thursday, January 14, at 3 p.m. ET**, for a preliminary overview of the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant program included in the

Economic Aid to Hard-Hit Small Businesses, Nonprofits, and Venues Act. Eligible organizations with a reduction in revenue due to the COVID-19 Pandemic will have the opportunity to receive up to a \$10 million grant under the program. This webinar will provide introductory information about the grants, who can apply, how potential organizations can prepare, and additional details re: eligibility and applications. Click [here](#) to sign up for the webinar.

CDC Forecast Rise in COVID By End Of Month

The CDC predicted that January would be a disastrous month for the effects of the epidemic, even as the federal government allocated more than \$ 22 billion for testing, contact tracing, surveillance and vaccination. The CDC forecast, gathered from 36 coronavirus models, estimated that by the end of the month there would be 405,000–438,000 deaths. The previous ensemble forecast, published on December 30, is estimated at 424,000 deaths as of January 23. At the virus's epicenter is California, a state that has reported record hospitalizations.

EMPLOYER REMINDERS

Cal/OSHA Emergency Temporary Standards

On January 8, 2021, the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) issued an updated version of its [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\) guidance, "COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standards Frequently Asked Questions,"](#) about COVID-19 [Emergency Temporary Standards](#). The FAQs address many issues about which employers had questions, including paid time off and exclusion pay. The FAQs **do not** provide targeted guidance to employers as to how to rebut the statutory presumption that a COVID-19 injury is work-related. The FAQs simply state that employers should "conduct[] comparable investigations and produc[e] comparable evidence to show it is more likely than not that an employee's COVID-19 exposure did not occur in the workplace." California Labor Code section 3212.88(e)(2), which was part of [Senate Bill 1159](#), provides that an employer's attempt to rebut the presumption may include "evidence of measures in place to reduce potential transmission of COVID-19 in the employee's place of employment and evidence of an employee's nonoccupational risks of COVID-19 infection." Cal/OSHA will enforce exclusion pay by issuing citations and requiring abatement. Cal/OSHA does not consider "employee[s] receiving workers' compensation temporary disability benefits for wages lost during the period in which they are excluded from the workplace to be 'able and available to work.'" An employee cannot receive temporary disability benefits and exclusion pay. [Anthony Zaller](#) put together very useful information regarding the new Cal/OSHA Emergency Temporary Standards (ETS) that became effective on November 30. Here are five critical questions Anthony believes employers must consider about the ETS and their impact on the workplace:

1. What new reporting obligations do employers have under the ETS?

- Employers must notify their local health department immediately but no longer than 48 hours after the employer knows or should have known of three or more COVID-19 cases.

- Cal/OSHA must be notified when a COVID-19-related serious illness (such as a COVID-19 illness requiring inpatient hospitalization) or death occurs.

2. What investigation obligations do employers have regarding COVID-19 cases in the workplace?

The ETS requires employers to:

- Develop an effective procedure to investigate COVID-19 cases in the workplace. This includes procedures for verifying COVID-19 case status, receiving information regarding COVID-19 test results and onset of COVID-19 symptoms, and identifying and recording COVID-19 cases.
- For positive cases at the place of employment, employers need to:
- Determine the day and time the COVID-19 case was last present, and to the extent possible, the date of the positive tests and/or diagnosis, and the date the COVID-19 case first had one or more COVID-19 symptoms, if any were experienced.
- Determine who may have had a COVID-19 exposure and evaluate whether any employees need to be excluded from the workplace.
- Give notice of the potential exposure to employees/independent contractors/other employers present at the workplace within one business day (employers must also comply with the written notice requirements of AB 685 as of January 1, 2021).
- Offer testing at no cost to employees during their working hours to all employees who had potential COVID-19 exposure in the workplace.
- Investigate if any workplace conditions contributed to the risk of COVID-19 exposure and what could have done to reduce this exposure.

3. What written plan must employers have to comply with the ETS?

To comply with the ETS, an employer must develop a [written COVID-19 Prevention Program](#) or ensure these elements are included in an existing Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP). The employer must implement the following:

- Communication to employees about the employer's COVID-19 prevention procedures
- Identify, evaluate and correct COVID-19 hazards
- Physical distancing of at least six feet unless it is not possible
- Use of face coverings
- Use engineering controls, administrative controls and personal protective equipment as required to reduce transmission risk
- Procedures to investigate and respond to COVID-19 cases in the workplace
- Provide COVID-19 training to employees

4. How do employers calculate the rate of pay for employees who are entitled to continued earnings?

Over a month after the ETS when into effect, Cal/OSHA has not issued any guidance on how employers are to make this calculation. As a reminder, the ETS require that employees who tests positive or have been exposed to COVID-19, are excluded from the workplace, and who

are "otherwise able and available to work" must continue to have their "earnings, seniority, and all other employee rights and benefits, including the employee's right to their former job status, as if the employee had not been removed from their job." Employers are permitted to apply their sick leave benefits towards this purpose and may consider benefit payments from public sources in making this calculation. However, the calculation of an employee's earnings can be difficult based on a number of factors. For example, the calculation is particularly difficult for employees who work a variable schedule. Hopefully, Cal/OSHA will be able to provide guidance on this requirement soon.

5. When must an employer provide COVID-19 testing to employees?

Employers must provide testing for employees when (1) the employee had a potential exposure in the workplace and (2) all employees at the "exposed workplace" during an outbreak (defined as 3 or more cases within a 30-day period). During an "outbreak," employees must be tested immediately, again one week later, and then administer continuous testing of employees who remain at the workplace at least once a week.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

LA County Sets Sights On Retired Nurses To Boost Vaccine Distribution

Los Angeles County is considering calling on retired nurses and other former health care workers to help administer doses. In LA County, health officials estimate as many as 1 in 5 people have SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes Covid-19, and have warned residents that any outdoor activity that was relatively safe two months ago is now high-risk. At a Board of Supervisors meeting Dr. Barbara Ferrer said the County is in a "desperate situation" and that an anticipated surge in infections stemming from winter holiday gatherings. Ferrer told supervisors vaccine rollout has been slow due to shortages in allocations from federal supplies and a limited number of personnel who cleared to administer doses. The County has received about 363,000 doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines but has only administered about 190,000 doses. LA County Supervisor Janice Hahn asked Ferrer whether the County could call on retired nurses to help distribute the vaccine.

County Discontinues Curative Covid-19 PCR Tests

The LA County Department of Health Services has discontinued the use of the Curative COVID-19 PCR tests at County-supported pop-up testing sites. The change comes after a review of the data that prompted the recent US Food and Drug Administration alert about the possibility of false negative results. Curative provided a limited number of tests at County-supported pop-up testing sites beginning in mid-December. Between December 13, 2020 and January 2, 2021, 24,241 Curative tests were administered at those sites. That made up about 10% of all COVID-19 tests administered at County-supported test sites during that same time frame. The Curative tests will be replaced with Fulgent Genetics tests. All COVID-19 tests have a risk of false negative results, which means that you may test negative when you actually have COVID-19. That is because the sensitivity depends on how well the sample was collected and the concentration of viral RNA in the sample. There is no reliable way to detect early infection, meaning that infection often spreads before symptoms develop. Nevertheless, PCR tests,

including the Curative test, remain better at detecting disease than other tests, including rapid tests.

BizHelp Program Prepares Businesses

The Los Angeles County Development Authority (LACDA) has launched a new online resource to help businesses large and small navigate through economic uncertainty and prepare them for a post-COVID-19 economy. The BizHelp Program will offer support and resources via a series of online webinars starting January 12, 2021. The BizHelp Program is available to all businesses in the County of Los Angeles and is offered free of charge. The LACDA has teamed up with three local technical assistance providers – Acelera Advisory Group, Pacific Asian Consortium in Employment, and Vermont Slauson Economic Development Corporation – to host webinars that will cover various topics such as tips for successfully securing financial resources, operating post COVID-19, understanding basics in accounting and bookkeeping, and improving credit for business owners. Registration is required to participate. Registration is now open. Webinars begin on January 12, 2021. Businesses interested in participating or requiring further information can click [here](#).

Fee Waiver Included in Governor's Proposed Budget

On January 5, 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom previewed his Equitable Recovery for California's Businesses and Jobs plan, the business and workforce recovery elements of his 2021-22 proposed Budget that will help California through the COVID-19 Pandemic and advance an equitable, broad-based recovery. This plan includes \$70.6 million for fee waivers to individuals and businesses most impacted by the Pandemic – including barbers, cosmetologists, manicurists, bars and restaurants. These waivers will assist those who have not been able to operate or are operating at reduced capacity during the Pandemic. Of this amount, \$45 million is proposed to provide fee waivers to approximately 59,000 entities (restaurants and bars) heavily impacted by health and safety restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Restaurants and bars will be eligible for fee waivers of licenses with expiration dates between February 1, 2021, and January 31, 2022. The proposed statutory changes authorize the waiver of license renewal fees for specified license types. The requirements and guidelines for submitting a fee waiver request and the process of certification for licensees will be published on the ABC's website.

LACoFD's Patient Care Plan To Alleviate Hospital Surge

The Los Angeles County Fire Department (LACoFD) has implemented the Hospital EMS Surge Assistance Plan at local emergency departments that are experiencing challenges with patient overflow and ambulance turnover. Developed in cooperation with the Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services Agency, the Los Angeles Area Fire Chiefs, the Ambulance Association, and the Hospital Association of Southern California, the surge plan serves as a short-term stop gap. The surge plan consolidates patients with ambulance crews, so they can be observed and monitored which releases ambulances back into service as soon as possible.

SACRAMENTO

California Revises Guidance For Administering COVID-19 Vaccines

California officials issued revised guidelines to local health departments authorizing them to give shots to lower-priority groups if demand wanes among people in higher-priority categories, or if doses are about to expire. With the process of administering COVID-19 vaccines moving slower than hoped, state officials issued revised guidelines to local health departments Thursday, authorizing them to give shots to lower-priority groups if demand wanes among people in higher-priority categories, or if doses are about to expire. Distribution of vaccines is following a set of priority "phases" and "tiers" outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state and local officials, with health care workers at the top of the priority list in what is known as Phase 1A. There are three "tiers" within that phase, covering various categories of medical workers and frontline responders.

California Health Leaders Want 1 Million Vaccinations In 10 Days

One million vaccinations over the next 10 days. That's the working goal of one of California's COVID-19 vaccination planning groups desire to speed up the state's mass vaccination campaign. California currently is in the first stage – Phase 1A – of the drive, which sent a first wave of shots to hospitals and pharmacies to inoculate frontline health care workers and long-term care residents. Phase 1A kicked off in mid-December, but has been slow going as health providers confront the logistical dilemma of redeploying staff to inject other staff in the middle of a winter rush on hospitals. There are also health care workers opting out. Of about 2 million Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna doses shipped to California so far, roughly 490,000 had been administered.

LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS

Judge Grants Church's Plea To Bolster COVID Lawsuit

Pastor Rob McCoy and the Newbury Park church he leads will be allowed to bolster their lawsuit filed against the County over coronavirus restrictions. Superior Court Judge Henry Walsh said the courts freely allow parties in litigation to amend their lawsuits and that the state of the law is evolving on religious restrictions. He cited in particular a Los Angeles Times story reporting comments made early this week by judges in the US Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Based on his reading, the federal court signaled it was going to modify previous rulings viewed as too restrictive on churches. Walsh did not elaborate, but the issue reportedly centers on the prohibitions on indoor worship services. McCoy and Godspoke Calvary Chapel have defied public health orders banning indoor services for months, arguing that the rules infringe on religious liberty and prevent fellowship that congregants need. Under Walsh's ruling, McCoy and the chapel were allowed to add claims that the restrictions violate the US Constitution along with their original claims of violations of the state Constitution.

Should SLO County Sue State To End Stay-At-Home Order? Supervisors Are Considering It

San Luis Obispo County officials will consider suing the state to end the ongoing coronavirus stay-at-home order impacting local businesses — even as the area continues to see its biggest surge in COVID-19 cases. The county Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 in favor of exploring a lawsuit that would push for the County to break away from the Southern California region and

potentially be eligible to return to the purple tier on its own. Supervisors John Peschong, Lynn Compton and Debbie Arnold voted in favor of learning more about a potential lawsuit. The dissenting votes were cast by Supervisors Bruce Gibson and Dawn Ortiz-Legg. Gov. Gavin Newsom in early December [instituted a statewide stay-at-home order](#) that divided California into regions and ordered stringent restrictions on business activities in areas where hospital intensive care unit capacity dipped below 15%. The County was included in the Southern California region, which also includes much larger population centers, such as Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties. This has [frustrated local elected officials and business owners](#), who believe the County belongs in a Central Coast region with Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.

ROUND THREE OF THE PPP

The New Stimulus Bill Amendments

The Act contains useful improvements for processing smaller Second Draw PPP loans, which the Act defines as a Second Draw PPP loan in an amount of \$150,000 or less. In that regard, the Act creates an expedited loan application and certification process for PPP loans not exceeding \$150,000—which must include a one-page certification form to be created by the SBA for use at the time of loan application.¹⁴ Significantly, a borrower seeking loan forgiveness for a PPP loan not exceeding \$150,000 is not required to submit additional documentation supporting the new short-form certification (except in the case of the applicability of another federal or state law or audit requirement). In addition, the mandatory documentation language in the CARES Act for smaller PPP loans of \$150,000 or less was amended to allow the SBA greater flexibility to determine documentation when determining eligibility.¹⁵

Administrative and PPP Loan Processing

The Act clarifies many existing PPP loan rules and adopts changes that industry participants have criticized as impediments to the efficient operation of the PPP. For the Second Draw PPP, the Act establishes a three-tiered structure for lender compensation for PPP loans originated after the effective date of the Act:

- For loans up to \$50,000, the processing fee is set at the lesser of 50 percent of the principal loan amount or \$2,500.
- For loans between \$50,000 and \$350,000, the processing fee is set at five percent of the principal loan amount, and
- For loans above \$350,000, the processing fee is set at three percent of the principal loan amount.¹⁶

As noted above, the Act expands on the categories of forgivable business-related expenses under the PPP, and now includes:

- Payments for any software, cloud computing, and other human resources and accounting needs

- Certain property damage costs relating to property damage due to public disturbances that occurred during 2020 that are not covered by insurance.
- Specified supplier costs that are essential to a business' operations, including costs incurred during (or prior to) the covered period of a PPP loan that are essential to the recipient's operations at the time the expenditure was made, and
- Covered worker protection expenditures, including capital expenditures, personal protective equipment and adaptive investments intended to comply with state and federal health and safety guidelines relating to COVID-19.

The Act attempts to correct certain origination problems experienced by borrowers and lenders under the Original PPP. Among other things, the Act, together with the Appropriations Act:

- Exempts loan forgiveness under the PPP from inclusion in ordinary income of a PPP borrower.
- Allows a borrower to elect a covered period ending at the point of the borrower's choosing—between 8 and 24 weeks after origination.
- Expands the seasonal period for calculation purposes to any 12-week period between February 15, 2019 and February 15, 2020.
- Clarifies that the interest rate on all PPP loans is non-compounding and non-adjustable.
- Repeals a provision in the CARES Act that required recipients of a PPP loan to deduct the amount of any EIDL loan from the PPP loan forgiveness amount.
- Prohibits publicly traded companies from obtaining PPP loans.
- Extends the covered period for the PPP through March 31, 2021 (which provides additional flexibility for a PPP borrower when utilizing PPP funds for approved costs and expenses).
- Clarifies the applicable period for employees' salaries of \$100,000 on an annualized basis as prorated during the period in which compensation is paid or incurred, and
- Clarifies that a business or organization that was not in operation on February 15, 2020 is not eligible for either a PPP loan under the Original PPP or the Second Draw PPP.

COVID-19 Vaccine Update

For the most up-to-date information about the COVID-19 vaccine in LA County, click [here](#) to view the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Vaccine Information page. During the coronavirus pandemic, scammers have been using robocalls, social media posts, and emails to take advantage of fear, anxiety, and confusion about COVID-19. They sell things that don't work, charge money for things that are free, and steal personal information. Now that the COVID-19 vaccine is in Los Angeles County, scammers are targeting local residents with new, vaccine-related schemes. Please beware!

Vaccine Myths The Department of Public Health recently released a myth busting information sheet for the COVID-19 vaccine. The document addresses the top 10 most circulated myths surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine.

Myth: These vaccines use genetic material to fight the virus. That means they can affect our genes.

The Facts: These vaccines do use genetic material, called mRNA (that stands for "messenger" RNA) to fight the virus but it doesn't do anything to your genes.

- Just as its name says, mRNA works like a messenger. In this case, the mRNA used in the vaccine tells your body to make a protein that kicks your immune system into action. The mRNA lets your body get a message from the virus without having to run into the virus directly.
- But it doesn't affect your genes. Keep in mind that you encounter genetic material from other plants and animals all the time, when you eat them. Your body breaks them down into their basic chemicals, using the proteins and fats and carbohydrates they contain to give you energy and make your cells work.
- Like the food you eat, the mRNA you get in a vaccine does have an effect on your health, but it doesn't change your genes or your DNA.

To be aware of COVID-19 Vaccine misinformation, click [here](#) to review the complete list of Myths about COVID-19 Vaccines.

WHAT WE'RE READING

LAUSD board votes to sue state over school reopening proposal amid Pandemic

The Los Angeles Unified School District plans to sue the state over Gov. Gavin Newsom's school-reopening proposal and to seek reimbursement for millions of meals it's been providing to the community since the coronavirus pandemic hit last March. The school board voted 7-0 in closed session on Tuesday, January 12, authorizing "litigation against the state of California, state entities and public officials related to the California's Safe Schools for All framework," Jefferson Crain To read the full story, click [here](#).

What The Expiration Of COVID-19 Paid Leave Laws Means For California Employers

For much of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, many California employees have utilized leave entitlements through federal, state, and local paid sick leave statutes and ordinances. As of December 31, 2020, however, the federal [Families First Coronavirus Response Act \("FFCRA"\)](#), [California's COVID-19 supplemental paid sick leave \("CSPSL"\)](#) — and many local supplemental paid sick leaves ("LSPSL") — have expired. With coronavirus cases still surging nationwide and no additional guidance on the new exclusion pay requirements under the Division of Occupational Safety and Health's ("Cal/OSHA") [COVID-19 emergency temporary standards \("ETS"\)](#), California employers are left wondering what paid leave laws may apply to their employees in 2021. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Superspreader 'Swinger' Party Busted In South Central LA

It was advertised as a "swinger's party." However, they were swapping more than just spouses. FOX 11 Investigates has been showing Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department breaking up superspreader events over the last several weeks. But we didn't see this twist coming. An "adults only" superspreader event got busted at a warehouse in South Central Los Angeles over the weekend. This time, it wasn't teenagers and young people... it was older, middle-aged partygoers. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Millions In California Coronavirus Jobless Benefits Sent To Out-Of-State Prisoners

In the latest revelation of potential criminal fraud involving California jobless benefits, an analysis has found that more than \$42 million in claims went to out-of-state prison and jail inmates, giving more clarity to what officials now estimate could be \$4 billion in scammed coronavirus relief funds. A large number of Florida inmates, including a man sentenced to 20 years for second-degree murder, are among the thousands of out-of-state prisoners who have allegedly received California pandemic unemployment benefits, according to a December analysis commissioned by the state Employment Development Department and reviewed by The Times. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Popular LA County Retail Spots Like Target, Costco And Home Depot Hit By COVID-19 Outbreak

As Los Angeles continues to battle COVID-19 -- as some say the city is becoming an "epicenter" of the Pandemic -- the virus is starting to trickle into some of the most popular retail spots. New data from Los Angeles County shows businesses like Target, Home Depot and Costco seeing cases from their employees. To read the full story, click [here](#).

City Leaders Stepping In After Neighbors Issue Complaints About 'Super Spreader' Party House

City leaders are stepping in after several people in a Los Angeles neighborhood have complained about a rental, saying that there have been constant massive parties held there and nothing was getting done to stop it. Neighbors say the rental on Curson Avenue has had several large gatherings, which is not allowed in LA County during the Pandemic. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Dozens More Cases Of Highly Contagious COVID-19 Variant Identified In San Diego County

County health officials have confirmed what they've suspected from the start — the more contagious variant of the coronavirus known as B.1.1.7 has infiltrated San Diego communities. And it's spreading fast. On Tuesday, county officials announced 24 more cases of the variant had been identified within COVID-19 test samples collected from December 27 through December 31. The variant is also suspected in four other infections. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Short On Equipment, Ambulances And Oxygen, LA County Hospitals Face Darkest Month

The coronavirus crisis battering Los Angeles County's medical system is reaching increasingly desperate levels, with healthcare providers running low on equipment, ambulance operators being told not to bring patients who have virtually no chance of survival to hospitals, and

officials scrambling to ensure they can provide enough lifesaving oxygen for critically ill patients. The number of COVID-19 patients in the County's beleaguered hospitals has hit an all-time high, according to data released Monday, and officials say they expect the situation to worsen in the coming weeks as a new surge of people who were infected during the holidays become ill. To read the full story, click [here](#).

LA County Could Mandate 'Hero Pay' For Some Grocery, Drugstore Workers

Grocery and retail drugstore employees who work in unincorporated Los Angeles County could see a pay bump of \$5 an hour if the county Board of Supervisors approves a "hero pay" ordinance later this month. The measure was quickly opposed by grocery industry leaders, who said it could require stores to raise prices at a time when their customers are struggling to make ends meet. To read the full story, click [here](#).

1 in 17 people In Los Angeles County Currently Has COVID-19, Model Projects

A leading COVID-19 model cited by the New York Times, FiveThirtyEight and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention projects that roughly 1 in 17 people in Los Angeles County are currently infected with the virus. Youyang Gu's covid19-projections.com works off the assumption that county-reported case counts are an undercount of actual infections, and estimates the current number of individuals infected in each County by calculating the base reproduction number (R0), using data from Johns Hopkins University and the COVID Tracking Project. To read the full story, click [here](#).

More Bay Area restaurants are protesting to bring back outdoor dining

Protests against dining bans are gaining steam in the Bay Area, with several local restaurants publicly speaking out against the ongoing restrictions. On the Peninsula, a brewery recently drew about 80 people to a peaceful protest. In Marin County, one restaurateur got more than 5,000 signatures in support of a petition, arguing outdoor dining should be reinstated. Meanwhile, a Napa restaurateur openly defied restrictions by hosting diners indoors [as recently as New Year's Day](#). They're arguing that there isn't sufficient scientific data linking COVID cases to outdoor dining, [a point that's been echoed by several Bay Area infectious disease experts](#). And they don't understand why outdoor restaurants should be banned when outdoor gyms and indoor retail are still allowed. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Only half of Fresno County health care workers want COVID vaccine. Why isn't it more?

Only about half of Fresno County's 58,000 health care workers have asked to be given a COVID-19 vaccine, according to health officials. The County has received 44,000 [doses of Moderna and Pfizer vaccines](#) through Tuesday. About 47% have been distributed to clinics and other health care facilities, according to Joe Prado, the County's community health division manager. In terms of why only about half of Fresno County health care workers who've been asked have accepted the offer to get vaccinated, Prado said a common hesitation was related to the vaccine being rushed. To read the full story, click [here](#).

High Stakes Election for Orange County's Coastal Cities Goes Public Next Week

A contentious special election for an open seat on the powerful Orange County Board of Supervisors so far has largely played out as a behind-the-scenes affair. Up until now, much of the movement has been private, with candidates and political party leaders jockeying for support from donors and community groups. But this next week, the election goes public. Supervisors are expected to take a public vote to ratify March 9 as the official election date. Mail-in voting would start about a month earlier, on February 8. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Company Agrees To Settlement Over Unapproved Coronavirus Antibody Test Kits

A company that sold in-home COVID-19 antibody test kits that were not approved by the US Food and Drug Administration has agreed to pay a \$50,000 civil penalty and made full refunds to consumers who bought the tests. Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer announced the settlement, pending court approval, also requires Applied BioSciences Corp. to comply with a permanent injunction barring the company from selling unapproved tests in the future, according to the City Attorney's Office. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Newsom proposes \$4.5 billion in state help for businesses and jobs affected by COVID-19

Promising to help small businesses and unemployed Californians hit hard by the COVID-19 Pandemic, Gov. Gavin Newsom on Tuesday previewed a \$4.5-billion stimulus program that includes a variety of grants and tax incentives, many of which would require swift legislative approval to take effect. The proposal also includes money earmarked for low-income residents to purchase zero-emission vehicles and for more charging and fueling stations to be built across the state, seeking to pair an economic incentive with progress on California's ambitious greenhouse gas reduction goals. To read the full story, click [here](#).

California Imposes New Health Order Forcing Hospitals With Available Capacity To Accept Transfer Patients

The California Department of Public Health on Tuesday ordered counties with available intensive care capacity to accept transfer patients from overwhelmed regions, a stop-gap measure intended to relieve pressure on facilities buckling under the strain of the latest surge. The new health order issued Tuesday night comes amid dwindling intensive care availability in Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley, where hospitals are straining under the influx of new coronavirus cases spurred by holiday gatherings. Both regions report 0% intensive care availability, according to state metrics for counting ICU beds. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Nearly Half Of The Nation's Worst-Hit Hospitals Amid COVID-19 Surge Are In California

Of the top 100 hospitals across the nation with the highest proportion of COVID-19 patients, 48 are in California, according to US Department of Health and Human Services data analyzed by USA Today for the week of Dec. 25-31, 2020. The next highest total belongs to Texas, with 15 hospitals in the top 100. California, the nation's most populous state, is home to about 40 million residents — roughly 10 million more than Texas, the second-most populous state in the US. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Dozens More Cases Of Highly Contagious COVID-19 Variant Identified In San Diego County

On Tuesday, county officials announced 24 more cases of the variant had been identified within COVID-19 test samples collected from December 27 through December 31. The variant is also suspected in four other infections. The people who tested positive are believed to have no travel history and live in 19 different households in San Diego, Chula Vista, La Mesa and Lakeside. The infected range in age from under 10 to over 70, with the average age coming in at 36 — the same as the overall average age for all county COVID-19 cases. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Airlines Call For COVID Testing For All International Travelers To The US.

Airlines for America, the trade group for the nation's largest carriers, expressed its support for the testing of inbound international travelers — as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — in a letter to Vice President Mike Pence, saying the change “will provide yet another layer of safety in the travel journey.” The proposed policy change would replace the administration's broad restrictions against inbound travel by anyone who has been in China, Iran, most of Europe or Brazil in the previous 14 days, with a few exceptions, including US citizens. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Overwhelmed By COVID-19, Hospitals In LA 'Making Difficult Decisions' As Patient Care Deteriorates

Conditions at Los Angeles County hospitals are worsening by the day, forcing officials to take increasingly desperate measures to prevent the health care system from crumbling under a crush of COVID-19 patients. Methodist Hospital of Southern California has taken the grim step of convening a triage team that will “make the difficult, but necessary decisions about allocating limited resources” to critically ill patients “based on the best medical information available,” officials said in a statement. To read the full story, click [here](#).

LA's Hospital Nightmare: Here's How Ambulance Service, 911 Calls Are Impacted Amid COVID-19 Surge

It's a health care nightmare right now in LA County. With resources so scarce, hospitals have to focus on patients who have the highest chance of survival. For the last few weeks during the COVID-19 surge, [the region's ICUs have had 0% capacity available](#). When there's no space at hospitals, ambulances have to handle the overflow. This has resulted in some changes to how the region handles emergencies: The public is being discouraged from calling 911 unless it's an absolute emergency. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Surge Of COVID-19 Patients Threatens To 'Max Out' Ventura County Hospitals, Officials Say

The COVID-19 surge pushes hospitals closer to being overwhelmed daily with only two staffed ICU beds available across Ventura County on Tuesday, officials said. “Some of (the hospitals) are going to dive into crisis really soon,” said Steve Carroll, administrator of the Ventura Emergency Medical Services Agency. “We are getting to a place where we are maxing out.” Officials said 421 of the record 969 people in the area's eight hospitals on Wednesday were being treated for COVID. Of the 126 people in intensive care beds, 82 were being treated for the coronavirus. To read the full story, click [here](#).

COVID-19 Sparks More Than 1,000 Workplace-Related Lawsuits In 2020 As Employees Complain About Safety, Wages

The COVID-19 Pandemic spawned more than 1,000 workplace-related lawsuits last year and drove a record number of class-action cases as employees sued over disputes over workplace safety, how they're paid while working from home, and family and medical leave. In 2020, the Pandemic led employees to file 1,005 workplace lawsuits in state and federal courts, according to Chicago-based law firm Seyfarth Shaw. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Fed Officials Fretted Over Virus Surge At December Meeting

Federal Reserve officials were warily eyeing a surge in coronavirus cases at their Dec. 15-16 meeting, but they hoped that vaccine breakthroughs might set the stage for a strong economic rebound in 2021. "With the pandemic worsening across the country, the expansion was expected to slow even further in coming months," according to [minutes](#) from the gathering of the Federal Open Market Committee, released Wednesday. "Nevertheless, the positive vaccine news" was "viewed as favorable for the medium-term economic outlook." To read the full story, click [here](#).

Newsom cancels news conference as "caution" amid protests

California Gov. Gavin Newsom canceled a Wednesday news conference on the coronavirus out of "an abundance of caution" after pro-Trump protesters gathered outside the state Capitol, though there were no major incidents or attempts to access the building. ... While Newsom chose to cancel his briefing, there were "no major incidents" reported during the demonstration at the Capitol, his office said in a statement. Newsom typically holds his coronavirus briefing at the Office of Emergency Services outside of Sacramento, but he had been in the Capitol for an earlier event and planned to hold Wednesday's news conference there. Hundreds of people gathered outside of the building and in downtown Sacramento, eventually drawing counter-protesters. To read the full story, click [here](#).

California Hospitals Prepping For Grim COVID-19 Choices

California hospitals struggling with a skyrocketing coronavirus surge are trying to prepare for the possibility that they may have to ration care for lack of staff and beds — and hoping they don't have to make that choice. The state avoided surging cases for months, but now the virus is raging out of control there and across the nation in the wake of Thanksgiving holiday gatherings that authorities say vastly spread infections. Only Arizona tops California in cases per resident. The state this week ordered hospitals in the hardest-hit areas to delay many elective surgeries in order to free up space. To read the full story, click [here](#).

What Obstacles Must Be Overcome To Offer In-Person Instruction In California Schools

Gov. Gavin Newsom's "Safe Schools for All" plan presented during the waning days of 2020 has raised hopes that more schools could reopen for in-person instruction this school year, at least for the state's youngest children. The goal, Newsom explained, is "to support all communities to be on track for safe in-person instruction by early spring 2021." Yet the outlook for that happening appears daunting. What challenges do districts face in jump-starting in person instruction? Here are the principle ones. To read the full story, click [here](#).

US Unemployment Claims Nearly Steady As Extra \$300 Payments Start

New applications for unemployment aid held nearly steady during the week of New Year's, as an extra \$300 in weekly payments kicked in from the coronavirus aid package signed into law last month. Weekly initial claims for jobless benefits from regular state programs, a proxy for layoffs, fell by 3,000 to a seasonally adjusted 787,000 in the week ended January 2, the Labor Department said Thursday. The prior week's figure was revised up by 3,000. Unemployment claims have remained at high levels during the Pandemic—holding at four times their pre-pandemic average at around 800,000 a week through the fall and into the winter. Claims peaked at nearly 7 million in the spring, when a majority of states issued stay at home orders early in the Pandemic. The pre-pandemic peak was 695,000. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Pandemic's uneven impact highlight California budget issues

Since California's progressive tax structure relies mostly on wealthy earners, the Pandemic has led to a strange contrast in the nation's most populous state: High unemployment coupled with strong state tax collections. The state has lost more than 1 million jobs compared with last year — the most in the country — yet it has collected \$74.4 billion in taxes, or \$13.7 billion more than it had anticipated. The result is what the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office calls a one-time "budget windfall." The office says the windfall could be between \$10 billion and \$40 billion, although it says \$26 billion is the most likely figure. That money can only be used once. It won't be available next year. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Californians Shouldn't Travel More Than 120 Miles From Home, State Says

Under the updated guidance from the California Department of Public Health, issued Wednesday, Californians are told to eschew traveling anywhere in the state that's more than 120 miles from their residences, unless doing so is essential. Travelers from other states or countries are also "strongly discouraged" from coming to California, except for essential purposes. The state defines such essential trips as any "associated with the operation, maintenance, or usage of critical infrastructure or otherwise required or expressly authorized by law ... including work and study, critical infrastructure support, economic services and supply chains, health, immediate medical care and safety and security." Nonessential travel, on the other hand, would be for recreational or tourism purposes. Read the updated Travel Advisory [here](#). To read the full story, click [here](#).

After EDD Freezes 1.4 Million Accounts, Agency Could Be Swamped By ID Verifications

The suspended claims number from the Employment Development Department accounts for nearly one in seven of all claims for jobless benefits paid by the state throughout the Pandemic. Including another 1.9 million claims that EDD said it had already disqualified for fraud, that means that about a third of all pandemic claims are potentially fraudulent. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Attempt to increase COVID-19 enforcement fails in Carlsbad

Carlsbad restaurant owners and employees argued successfully this week against a proposal to step up the city's enforcement of state and county health orders to prevent the spread of

COVID-19. Councilwoman Cori Schumacher's request for the city to establish citations and fines for violators was aimed at eateries that continue to operate in a "peaceful protest" of the health orders in the downtown Village, the council district she represents. None of the other Carlsbad City Council members supported her motion Tuesday. Instead, the council agreed to discuss at a future meeting a more comprehensive approach to compliance including assistance programs for businesses that follow the rules and collaboration with other cities and the County. To read the full story, click [here](#).

California Activates 'Mass Fatality' Program As State Sets New Virus Records

According to the California Office of Emergency Services, or OES, a mass fatality is an incident in which more deaths take place in a period of time than can be handled by local coroner or medical emergency personnel. ... Mark Pazin, the state's OES chief, told Sacramento-based NBC affiliate KCRA that the purpose of the program is to ensure the spiking death tolls don't overwhelm localities. "I know it sounds morbid, but it's got to be said, that we have the body bags, that we have the proper refrigeration units, that the capacity has not outstripped the local morgue or funeral home," Pazin said. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Virus Surge Ends Seven Months of U.S. Jobs Growth

The US shed 140,000 jobs in December as a resurgence of the coronavirus ended seven months of job growth and weakened the recovery. Restaurants and bars drove the decline by cutting 372,000 jobs last month, the Labor Department said Friday. The broader category of hospitality and leisure industries—which adds hotels, museums, tourist sites—also saw losses, while schools and governments cut jobs as the Pandemic triggered new restrictions on activity. Jobs gains in most other industries weren't enough to offset the sharp decline in areas sensitive to the state of the Pandemic. The US jobless rate held steady at 6.7%, far below its April peak of 14.8% but still almost twice its pre-pandemic level. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Biden Plans To Release Nearly All Available Vaccine Doses In An Attempt To Speed Delivery

President-Elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. plans to release nearly all available coronavirus vaccine doses "to ensure the Americans who need it most get it as soon as possible," a sharp break from the Trump administration's practice of holding back some of the vaccine, the Biden transition team said Friday. ... Releasing the vast majority of the vaccine doses goes against the recommendation of officials from the Food and Drug Administration — experts whose advice Mr. Biden has pledged to follow. But a transition official, speaking anonymously to provide insight into the president-elect's thinking, said would use the Defense Production Act, if needed, to ensure that enough doses are available. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Lawmakers Protest At State Capitol For 'Reopen Cal Now'

A small protest was held at the State Capitol Saturday evening, but unlike other times, it mostly consisted of local lawmakers. It's all part of a three-day conference being held in a small Sacramento County town in hopes of reopening the state. The protest lasted about an hour and there were no major incidents. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Pandemic-Ravaged Economy, Housing Issues Await Returning California Lawmakers

Mending California's coronavirus-ravaged economy and fixing a state unemployment agency that is at the center of a titanic fraud case that could exceed \$2 billion are at the top of the to-do list when lawmakers resume their session on Monday. To read the full story, click [here](#).

California Vaccine Rollout Beset by Stockpile Shortage, Logistical Challenges

After receiving her first dose of Moderna's Covid-19 vaccine Friday at a distribution site nestled between palm trees of a Los Angeles park, health care worker Ana Giron finally brushed away some of the stress and anxiety she's carried since the start of the Pandemic. Giron, who works at a dental clinic in Pasadena, waited 20 minutes for the first of two required doses, but she's waited months to take this step towards immunization for a virus that has killed nearly 360,000 Americans to date. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Newsom's State Budget Earmarks Billions In COVID-19 Help For Workers And Schools

Gov. Gavin Newsom sent a budget to the California Legislature on Friday that calls for a swift and expansive boost in the state government's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, earmarking much of an unallocated tax revenue windfall for efforts to help workers and businesses, boost public health and speed up the reopening of public school classrooms. In all, the proposal dedicates more than \$14 billion to an array of coronavirus relief initiatives, while setting aside money in support of virus vaccination efforts and almost \$3 billion in short-term cash reserves if additional needs arise. Newsom urged lawmakers to take action on the most pressing issues — including an extension of the state's moratorium on evictions and funding for California's COVID-19 vaccination push — by the end of the month. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Bay Area's Stay-At-Home Order Extended As ICU Capacity Remains Below 15%

As was expected, health officials have extended the Bay Area stay-at-home order. The order would have been lifted on Friday, however ICU capacity in the region remains below 15%, dictating the continuation of the existing stay-at-home order. The Bay Area's stay-at-home order was already extended indefinitely as public health officials are waiting two or three weeks after Christmas and New Year's, when so many people traveled and gathered with family, to see if there is yet another surge in coronavirus cases leaving a scarcity of ICU beds. To read the full story, click [here](#).

California COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Hit With Software System Problems

California's COVID-19 vaccine rollout is being at least partially slowed by technical problems with a software program used by the state to coordinate vaccine distribution among a vast network of providers, according to local and state health officials. The online software system, PrepMod, is a vaccine management tool used to coordinate waitlists and inventory as well as send email proof of vaccinations to patients. It is unclear how widespread the problem is, but some providers, ranging from public clinics to nursing home operators, say the system is at times limiting access to the much-needed vaccines. The software is hosted on the state's CalVax website. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Gavin Newsom Said He Would Punish Counties For Not Enforcing COVID Rules. Why Hasn't He?

Nearly six months later, almost every Californian is under a stay-at-home order. Coronavirus patients suffer in hospital gift shops. Healthcare workers in Los Angeles ration oxygen. An additional 23,000 Californians have lost their lives. Yet the state has yet to withhold any county money. Two cities saw money redirected to support COVID-19 testing in their communities. ... The Democratic governor also says most counties have done a good job, however. Most of the \$2.5 billion has already been distributed, according to the Department of Finance, although the state still has another \$750 million it can redirect in the event the state finds that a county is not adhering to the public health rules. To read the full story, click [here](#).

COVID-19 Job Losses Will Worsen LA Homelessness By 2023, New Report Says

Based on the effects of the 2008 recession, the Economic Roundtable report "Locked Out" concludes that pandemic-related unemployment will start a brutal cycle of homelessness. It says the uptick began as a trickle in 2020, but will triple this year and peak by 2023. By then, the number of additional working-age adults with no place of their own to sleep will reach more than 52,000 in Los Angeles County, 131,000 in California and 600,000 across the nation, it said. The most recent federal estimate, for 2019, estimated there were 568,000 homeless people nationally and 129,000 in California. The 2020 count for Los Angeles County put the number at just over 66,000, meaning the projection is for a near doubling. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Layoffs Jolt Tech, Hotel, Restaurant, Retail Sectors

A tech firm, hotels, restaurants, and a big retailer are among the latest companies to detail their layoff plans to state officials, a grim reminder that economic woes during the coronavirus recession have yet to run their course. The latest round of planned and upcoming job cuts in and near the Bay Area indicate that the region's workers must brace for fresh bouts of unemployment, a tough blow that arrives on the heels of 10 months of coronavirus-linked business shutdowns. To read the full story, click [here](#).

LAUSD, Labor Leaders Say State's COVID School-Reopening Plan Falls Short

Superintendent Austin Beutner was joined Monday morning by representatives of more than a half-dozen district unions to outline their concerns with the plan Newsom introduced on December 30 as part of his \$227.2 billion state budget proposal. The plan includes \$2 billion in schools funding and seeks to reopen most campuses by February, with elementary students and those with special needs coming back first. The plan also calls for increased COVID-19 testing and mandatory masks for school staff and students. But Beutner and others within LAUSD contend this not enough. To read the full story, click [here](#).

Covid-19 Pandemic Drives Municipal Borrowing to 10-Year High

Municipal bond issuance in 2020 was the highest in a decade, reflecting the collapse of interest rates and the increased costs cities and state governments are facing from Covid-19 shutdowns. Bonds for new projects reached \$252 billion last year, according to Refinitiv, a small increase from the previous year. The new borrowing drove the total amount of outstanding muni debt

above \$3.9 trillion for the first time since 2013, according to the Federal Reserve data from the third quarter. To read the full story, click [here](#).

When Can I Get A Covid-19 Vaccine? How Will I Find Out? Answers To Your California Vaccine Questions.

A state workgroup has come up with phases for vaccine distribution based on which Californians are most at risk for contracting COVID-19, who is dying at the highest rates and what jobs are most essential. Health care workers and long-term care staff and residents are first, followed by other frontline workers (education, agriculture, emergency services) and people over 65. The last planned phase includes people aged 50 to 65, and workers in fields such as defense, hazardous materials and government operations. Each phase has tiers that further indicate priority. Here is who is included in each phase, and when the state expects to vaccinate people in each phase. The dates are estimates based on a state report given in December and will vary by County. [See more details about expected dates for each phase here](#). To read the full story, click [here](#).

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