

## **Weekly COVID-19 Update From EKA January 20, 2021**

Every minute, on average, ten people in LA County test positive for COVID-19, and these 15,000 individuals who test positive each day were capable of infecting others for two days before they had any symptoms or knew they were positive. Coronavirus deaths are rising in nearly two-thirds of American states as a winter surge pushes the overall toll toward 400,000 amid warnings that a new, highly contagious variant is taking hold. 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.

### **Travel**

The LA County Health Officer discourages travel, especially for non-essential purposes. LA County has a mandatory quarantine after long-distance travel into Los Angeles County. All persons traveling into Los Angeles County, whether by air, car, train, or any other means, directly or indirectly from the point of origin outside the Southern California Region, defined as the counties of Imperial, Inyo, Los Angeles, Mono, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura, must quarantine for at least ten days after arrival. "Quarantine" means staying 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 must continue to monitor themselves for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days after arrival. There are twelve exemptions from mandatory quarantine listed in the Directive, including any person commuting to or traveling solely in the course of performing an Essential Government Function.

## **NATIONAL**

### **US Restrictions**

Even as the nation finds itself in the most lethal phase of the outbreak, governors and local officials in hard-hit parts of the country show little willingness to impose any new restrictions on businesses to stop the spread of Coronavirus. Both Democratic and Republican leaders are signaling opposition to forced closings and other measures. Some have expressed fear of compounding the economic damage. Some see little

patience among their constituents for more restrictions after ten months. A slow start had triggered widespread concern from states and public health officials. The government will no longer hold back required second doses of vaccines, practically doubling supply.

### **Biden Admin Won't Lift COVID Travel Restrictions After Trump Announces Changes**

Shortly after the Trump administration announced it would be lifting COVID travel restrictions for the UK, parts of Europe and Brazil, the incoming Biden team said that would not be the case. Jen Psaki, incoming White House press secretary for President-elect Joe Biden, tweeted that the new administration doesn't intend to lift the travel restrictions on January 26. Trump issued a proclamation Monday night, announcing he will rescind travel bans for non-U.S. citizens from Brazil, the United Kingdom and much of Europe next week. The UK and Europe bans were instituted in March, while the Brazil ban was implemented in May.

### **PPP Reopens to Small Lenders**

The U.S. Small Business Administration has reopened the Paycheck Protection Program loan portal to PPP-eligible lenders with \$1 billion or less in assets for First and Second Draw. The SBA granted dedicated PPP access to Community Financial Institutions (which include Community Development Financial Institutions, Minority Depository Institutions, Certified Development Companies, and Microloan Intermediaries as part of the agency's ongoing efforts to reach underserved and minority small businesses. The SBA will continue its emphasis on reaching smaller lenders and businesses by opening to approximately 5,000 more lenders, including community banks, credit unions, and farm credit institutions. To learn more, click [here](#).

### **Vaccines to Stimulus Checks**

President Biden is proposing a \$1.9 trillion plan to expand coronavirus vaccinations, help individuals and jump-start the economy. The plan, which would require congressional approval, is packed with proposals on health care, education, labor and cybersecurity. Here's a look at what's in it:

- A \$20 billion national program would establish community vaccination centers across the US and send mobile units to remote communities. Medicaid patients would have their costs covered by the federal government, and the administration says it will take steps to ensure all people in the US can receive the vaccine for free, regardless of their immigration status.
- An additional \$50 billion would expand testing efforts and help schools and governments implement routine testing. Other efforts would focus on developing better treatments for COVID-19 and improving efforts to identify and track new strains of the virus.

## **Individuals And Workers**

- Stimulus checks of \$1,400 per person in addition to the \$600 checks Congress approved in December. By bringing payments to \$2,000 — an amount Democrats previously called for — the administration says it will help families meet basic needs and support local businesses.
- A temporary boost in unemployment benefits and a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures would be extended through September.
- The federal minimum wage would be raised to \$15 per hour from the current rate of \$7.25 per
- An emergency measure requiring employers to provide paid sick leave would be reinstated. The administration is urging Congress to keep the requirement through September 30 and expand it to federal employees.
- The child care tax credit would be expanded for a year, to cover half the cost of child care up to \$4,000 for one child and \$8,000 for two or more for families making less than \$125,000 a year. Families making between \$125,000 and \$400,000 would get a partial credit.
- \$15 billion in federal grants to help states subsidize child care for low-income families, along with a \$25 billion fund to help child care centers in danger of closing.

## **Small Business**

- \$15 billion in grants to more than 1 million small businesses that have been hit hard by the pandemic, as well as other assistance.

## **State & Local Government**

- \$350 billion in emergency funding for state, local and territorial governments to help front-line workers.
- \$20 billion in aid to public transit agencies.

## **EMPLOYER REMINDERS**

### **Workplace Outbreaks**

The COVID-19 surge in Los Angeles County has contributed to a surge in outbreaks at workplaces across the county, including grocery stores, warehouses, manufacturing facilities, and many other workplaces where people come together on a daily basis. In just over a month, outbreaks at these worksites increased from 9 per week on November 1 to 44 per week on December 6, nearly a fivefold increase. LA County has also experienced a rise in outbreaks in schools and daycare settings. Starting in the middle of November, outbreaks increased from about 20 outbreaks to a total of 70

outbreaks by mid-December. And while almost all the outbreaks were small and well-contained, dozens of staff and a small number of students were affected. These increases reflect a pattern of transmission: from worksite to home and back to worksites. As the percentage of people who are positive with COVID-19 increases, there is a larger pool of infected people walking around without symptoms, which now exposes a greater and greater percentage of people to this virus. There are currently 540 open outbreak investigations across LA County; the highest number Public Health has had. For a list of open investigations, click [here](#).

### **California's New Guidance On Emergency COVID-19 Standard**

Below is a beneficial article from Fisher Phillips regarding California Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) updated [COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standards Frequently Asked Questions](#) late last week in an attempt to provide more clarification and answer questions the agency has received about the [COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standard \(ETS\)](#) that went into effect November 30, 2020. The update, released on January 8, provides some important clarifications but also leaves some questions unanswered. Below is an overview of some of the important updates and clarifications that all California employers should review.

### **Exclusion Pay And Benefits**

Despite previous rumors, the updated FAQs do not eliminate or dramatically limit the obligation to provide exclusion pay. However, the new FAQs do provide some more clarity on exclusion pay and benefits. Per the ETS, employers shall ensure all COVID-19 cases and exposures are excluded from the workplace until the applicable return-to-work criteria is met. For employees excluded and otherwise able to work, employers shall continue and maintain employees' earnings, seniority, and all other employee rights and benefits, including the employee's right to their former job status as if they had not been removed from their job. Two exceptions apply to this requirement: 1) during a period of time an employee is unable to work for reasons other than protecting persons at the workplace from possible COVID-19 transmission; or 2) if the employer demonstrates the COVID-19 exposure is not work-related.

The new FAQs clarify that if an employee who is "unable to work because of his or her COVID-19 symptoms," they are not eligible for exclusion pay (FAQ # 52). This appears to address situations in which the employee is too ill to work because of their symptoms. Also, if an employee is out for longer than a standard quarantine period, the "extended quarantine period may be an indication that the employee is not able and available to work due to their illness" (FAQ #53). Again, this appears to address situations in which an employee develops significant symptoms or complications that extend beyond the normal quarantine period. Exclusion pay may not be required in

such circumstances, but the employee may be eligible for other benefits like temporary disability.

The FAQs also provide examples of being "unable to work because of other reasons" under the first exemption to exclusion pay, including, but not limited to business closure, caring for a family member, disability or vacation (FAQ # 55). The FAQs provide guidance on how an employer "demonstrates" that an exposure is non-work-related under the second exemption to exclusion pay. Such a showing involves "an employer conducting comparable investigations and producing comparable evidence to show it is more likely than not that an employee's COVID-19 exposure did not occur in the workplace" (FAQ # 56-57). Though Cal/OSHA makes clear that it may issue a citation or require abatement for a violation of the exclusion pay requirements (FAQ # 58), the FAQs state that, "whether employees or another agency can bring a claim in another forum is outside the scope of Cal/OSHA's authority." Therefore, there is continued risk that employees will attempt to bring wage claims for unpaid exclusion pay. In addition, the FAQs address the interaction between exclusion pay and temporary disability workers' compensation payments and make clear that an employee cannot receive both workers' compensation temporary disability benefits for wages and exclusion pay (FAQ # 59-60).

### **Testing**

The ETS imposed some significant testing requirements on employers when there is one COVID-19 case or an outbreak. The FAQs provide some helpful and welcomed clarifications in the area of testing. Per the ETS, when there has been even just one COVID-19 case in the workplace, employers must "offer COVID-19 testing at no cost to employees during their working hours to all employees who had potential COVID-19 exposure in the workplace." In the outbreak sections of the ETS, the language is slightly different and states that employers "shall provide COVID-19 testing." The different verbiage has been a source of confusion as to whether or not Cal/OSHA required employers to mandate testing in the outbreak context.

Fortunately, the new FAQs clarify that "offer" testing and "provide" testing have the same meaning (FAQ #28). Cal/OSHA now appears to interpret this requirement (even in outbreak scenarios) to merely require that the employer offer testing at no cost to the employee. The FAQs further clarify that the employer does not violate the ETS if an employer offers testing and the employee declines or refuses to take the test (and in such a situation, a declination form if not required (FAQ #31). The FAQs also clarify that the requirement that testing be provided "during working hours" merely means that they must be compensated for their time and travel expenses, not necessarily during the employee's normal working hours (FAQ #32). There is also clarification that

onsite testing is not required, and free testing facilities such as free county facilities may be utilized. (FAQs #29 and #30).

### **Exposed Workplace/Outbreaks**

Per the ETS, "exposed workplace" is defined as any work location, working area, or common area at work used or accessed by a COVID-19 case during the high-risk period, including bathrooms, walkways, hallways, aisles, break or eating areas, and waiting areas. This does not include buildings or facilities not entered by a COVID-19 case. Despite FAQ 39's guidance, starting January 1, 2021, the ETS expressly incorporated the broader "worksites" definition of AB 685 into its "exposed workplace" definition. Specifically, AB 685 defines "worksites" as "the building, store, facility, agricultural field, or other location where a worker worked during the infectious period." However, the term "worksites" does not apply to buildings, floors, or other locations of the employer that a qualified individual did not enter. The definition of "exposed workplace" and how an employer determines the "exposed workplace" has been another common source of confusion for employers, particularly in the context of outbreak testing. The new FAQs provide clarification on how an employer determines what part of a workplace is an "exposed workplace" for purposes of determining if an outbreak has occurred and who must be tested but must be examined closely.

The FAQs state that an "exposed workplace" is defined at section 3205(b)(7) and includes "any work location, working area or common area used or accessed by a COVID-19 case during the 'high-risk period.'" They then go on to state that "for purposes of determining whether an outbreak has occurred, there must be three COVID-19 cases, all of whom worked in, used, or accessed the same 'work location, working area or common area used or accessed' in a 14-day period. If one of the three cases is in a different work location within an establishment, an outbreak has not occurred.

Areas a COVID-19 case passed through (i.e., traveled through en route to a work area and did not stop or stopped momentarily while wearing a face covering) are not considered in determining the area of an "exposed workplace." For example, if all three COVID-19 cases have been in a common area, but one of the cases only passed through while wearing a face covering, an outbreak has not occurred for purposes of the ETS" (FAQ #42). Though this appears to clarify how to determine an "exposed workplace" for outbreak purposes, there are omissions from the FAQs that employers may want to keep in mind. For example, the definition of exposed workplace only provides for part of the actual definition from the ETS and does not reference the incorporated "worksites" definition from AB 685. Moreover, the FAQ only references

the "three cases in 14 days" outbreak scenario and not the "20 cases in 30 days" scenario.

The FAQs do address that employers can separate employees into cohorts to reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 cases occurring in the same work locations/areas (FAQ #43). Also, for employers who have several non-overlapping work shifts at a facility, each shift may be considered as a separate "exposed workplace" if the facility is well-ventilated and the cleaning and disinfection requirements of the ETS are met between or before shift changes (FAQ #44). There is also guidance on how to count the applicable number of COVID-19 cases (FAQs #45 and #46).

### **Return-To-Work Criteria**

The FAQs note the reduced 10- and seven-day quarantine guidelines in the [December 14, 2020, Executive Order](#) and current California Department of Public Health (CDPH) guidelines. They also added a new acceptable method for meeting the return-to-work criteria by allowing for a licensed healthcare professional determination that an employee is not or is no longer a COVID-19 case, in accordance with CDPH or local health department recommendations. (FAQ #48).

### **Possible Critical Infrastructure Waivers**

In addressing critical infrastructure and essential workforces, the ETS does provide for the ability by employers to request a waiver to not exclude employees or bring them back earlier if it would constitute an undue risk to community health and safety. However, the ETS itself failed to provide any detail on the meaning of this term or the process. The new FAQs provide some guidance for employers in this area. First, the new FAQs state that "an operation must provide goods or services, the interruption of which would cause an undue risk to a community's health and safety to qualify. This exception is narrower than the definition of 'critical infrastructure,' though such operations may qualify if there is an adverse impact on a community's health and safety. A facility must be facing potential staffing shortages...in order to qualify for a waiver" (FAQ # 61). Second, the FAQs explain the process and information that must be submitted in a written waiver request (FAQ # 62). However, these requirements may be difficult to satisfy for a number of reasons. One of the five criteria the FAQs state is needed to constitute a complete waiver request is a statement that "there are no local or state health officer orders for isolation or quarantine of the excluded employees." Finally, the new FAQs state that, in the event of an emergency, "an employer may request a provisional waiver by calling the local district office while it prepares its written request" (FAQ # 62).

### **Enforcement**

As employers work to comply, the FAQs indicate for the first two months that the ETS is in effect – through February 1, 2021 – Cal/OSHA will cite but not assess monetary penalties for violations of the ETS that would not have been considered a violation of the employer's IIPP or other standard in effect before the ETS (FAQ # 10). However, this will not apply where an employer fails or refused to abate a violation of the ETS identified by Ca/OSH or in the case of imminent hazards.

### **Physical Distancing**

For employers grappling with the physical distancing requirements, the FAQs provide more detail regarding measuring between "bodies" or "breathing zones," "fixed work locations," and partitions (FAQ # 16-19). They also clarify that employees who work within six feet of one another are "close contacts," regardless of partitions (FAQ # 19).

### **What You Should Do Next**

Many California employers spent the last month scrambling to implement the new ETS requirements. This guidance provides much-needed guidance on common issues and necessitates immediate action from employers. For those who have already developed protocols and procedures, you should confirm your compliance efforts align with this new guidance.

## **VACCINATION**

### **COVID-19 Vaccine Registration Open for LA County Residents Aged 65 and Older**

Los Angeles County residents who are 65 years old and older can now register for COVID-19 vaccination appointments. Supply is limited. Residents in this high-priority age group should visit the [Vaccinate LA County](#) website now to schedule their appointments. Residents who don't have computer access may call (833) 540-0473 between 8 AM and 8:30 PM for help with reservations. The vaccine supply is still extremely limited, and Los Angeles County continues to urge patience as the County works urgently with federal and state partners to expand capacity and supply in the weeks ahead.

To ensure that people at higher risk of transmission and illness are vaccinated first, Los Angeles County has established a tier system. In addition to those 65+, priority for current vaccination is going to frontline healthcare workers and residents and staff at skilled nursing and long-term care facilities. This strategy works to protect our entire community by ensuring that our most vulnerable and most critical healthcare workers do not get sick. The opening of appointment registration for a new tier today comes as the County opens five large capacity vaccination sites across the County. The five established sites, which were chosen for their regional accessibility and their ability to handle large capacities of people, are:



- Pomona Fairplex, 1101 W McKinley Ave., Pomona, CA 91768
- The Forum, 3900 W Manchester Blvd., Inglewood, CA 90305
- California State University, Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge, CA 91330
- A. County Office of Education, 12830 Columbia Way, Downey, CA 90242
- Six Flags Magic Mountain, 26101 Magic Mountain Pkwy., Valencia, CA 91355

These large-scale vaccination sites started operating Tuesday, January 19, and will be able to vaccinate approximately 4,000 people per day at each site, significantly increasing the number of people vaccinated. The large-scale vaccination sites will aim to vaccinate 500,000 Los Angeles County residents in a month. Vaccinations are free, and available to all, regardless of immigration status or insurance coverage. For those who have insurance, coverage information may be requested as part of the appointment scheduling process. In addition to the LA County operated sites, residents have other options for making an appointment for a vaccine. Currently, more than 75 pharmacies have registered to provide vaccinations, and the County will continue to add more as more vaccines are available. Vaccine allocations are also going to large healthcare provider organizations like Kaiser Permanente and Providence Health and Services. In addition, residents may call their healthcare provider, as well, who may direct them to a preferred location for the vaccine. For up-to-date information on LA County's vaccine program, click [here](#)

### **Biden To Activate FEMA And National Guard To Vaccinate Americans**

President Joe Biden said he'll activate the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Guard to help get [COVID-19](#) vaccines to millions of Americans. Biden said his top priority when he takes office next is to vaccinate Americans against the virus, as the pandemic continues to rage throughout the country. Previously, he pledged his administration would administer 100 million COVID-19 vaccine doses in his first 100 days in office. The President said 100 federally funded vaccine clinics will be launched within the first month of his term. The plan also calls for mobile clinics to be deployed in urban and rural areas that are hard to reach. Pharmacies across the country will also be used to distribute the vaccine as the number of Americans eligible to get it expands, Biden said. This will let people get vaccinated just miles from their homes and will allow them to schedule those appointments at their convenience.

### **Defense Production Act**

The President said he will invoke the Defense Production Act to "maximize the manufacture of vaccines and vaccine supplies for the country." The Biden team had previously hinted at using this wartime production law, which lets presidents compel companies to prioritize manufacturing for national security purposes. Biden said that activating the Defense Production Act will increase the supply of the necessary equipment used to manufacture and deliver the vaccine. Companies will be directed to make everything from more personal protective gear to vials to hold the vaccines to

syringes used in injecting the vaccines. Biden said during his speech that his administration has already worked with manufacturers and has them lined up to start production.

## **LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

### **Los Angeles County Officials Are Advising Essential Workers To Wear Masks At Home**

Things are so bad in Los Angeles County that health officials are now advising all essential workers to wear masks inside their own home to prevent spreading Covid-19 within their household. Los Angeles County Director of Public Health Barbara Ferrer said "Right now, because there is so much spread, we're recommending that people wear their face coverings while they're inside the home. That's for people who are either leaving their home every day for work or who are running errands regularly for their family. Doing so will add a layer of protection while we get through this surge."

### **LA Fire Department Sees Positivity Rate Plummet After Most Firefighters Get Vaccinated**

The Los Angeles County Fire Department saw its COVID-19 testing positivity rate fall significantly after 75% of firefighters on the force received their first COVID-19 vaccine. When the first vaccines were being rolled out in late December, weekly LACoFD positivity rates reached 18%, roughly equivalent to positivity rates in the county's general population. Today, after three-quarters of the force opted to get vaccinated, the LACoFD positivity rate has fallen to 5.6%. This week, firefighters will start receiving their second dose of the two-dose vaccine.

### **LA County Extends Health Worker Outreach Initiative**

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health's Community Health Worker (CHW) Outreach Initiative has been extended after the federal government extended the CARES Act funding into 2021. Originally slated to end December 30, 2020, this extension will provide an estimated \$3 million in unspent funds for partner agencies to conduct outreach by deploying CHWs through the end of January and possibly into February.

## **CITY OF LOS ANGELES**

### **LA City Council Ramps Up Mask Enforcement, Including Issuing Fines**

The Los Angeles City Council voted to increase mask enforcement amid the COVID-19 pandemic and directed the city attorney to draft an ordinance laying out repercussions for people who refuse to cover their faces or confront others without wearing face coverings. The motion, as amended by Councilman Mike Bonin, instructs the Los

Angeles City Attorney to draft an ordinance to provide fines and penalties for refusing to wear a mask at an indoor public place when requested to do so by the facility's management or operators, and for those refusing to wear a mask while invading someone's personal space. Bonin's amendment was seconded by Councilman Paul Koretz, who added his own amendment to the motion. Koretz' amendment instructs departments within the Administrative Citation Enforcement program to prioritize issuing citations for mask violations to people who do not wear face coverings in public, and it requests a report within 30 days on the number of citations that have been issued, rate of compliance and ongoing challenges.

### **Rapid Antigen COVID-19 Tests Are Now Available at LAX**

LAX is now offering COVID-19 test results in as little as 30 minutes with the addition of rapid antigen tests at the airport's onsite laboratory. The lab opened in late December, offering rapid Polymerase Chain Reaction nasal swab tests with results available in 3-5 hours for tests collected at the lab across from Terminal 6, and results in less than 24 hour for samples collected at the Terminal 2 and Tom Bradley International Terminal locations. The new nasal-swab antigen tests, which are available only at the Terminal 6 lab location, cost \$80 and have results available in just 30-60 minutes, airport officials said. PCR tests remain \$125 each.

## **SACRAMENTO**

### **Get COVID Notification on Your Phone**

California health officials have urged residents to sign up for the California Notify mobile app to help track coronavirus cases, but most of the state population has yet to register. According to the California Health Department, about eight million people in the state have signed up out of the population of roughly 40 million people. You can opt-in to receive notifications on your cell phone when you have come in contact with someone who tested positive for the virus. California Notify does not gather your name, your contact information, your location, your movements or the identity of the people you meet. Click [here](#) to learn more and sign up.

## **LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS**

### **Restaurants Launch COVID-19 Suits For Permit Refunds**

Restaurant owners in Orange County are suing the state claiming they're slapped unfairly with fees for liquor licenses and health permits at the same time that civil orders threaten their businesses by forcing them to reduce operations. Costa Mesa, California-based Pizzeria Ortica LLC, the lead plaintiff in the proposed class action filed in state court. The pizzeria stressed that it doesn't dispute government closure orders

based on concerns about public health and safety, but it does object to being ceaselessly charged with business permit and licensing fees, taxes, and lateness penalties levied by county and state entities as it struggles to stay afloat. The suit claims violations of California government code sections 53720 and 53723, which require voter approval of local government taxes.

### **Federal Lawsuit Aimed at Allowing Restaurants to Reopen**

After winning a lawsuit in LA County Superior Court, attorney Mark Geragos has now filed a federal lawsuit aimed at opening local restaurants. The lawsuit was filed late last month after LA County Superior Court Judge James Chalfant ruled in Geragos' favor and overturned the county order closing restaurants, but ruled he could not allow them to reopen due to the state health order. The lawsuit claims the health order violates the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, both of which guarantee due process, and calls for declaratory and injunctive relief. The federal lawsuit claims Newsom's order to close restaurants has deprived "plaintiff and all other similarly situated small business owners in California of fundamental rights protected by the US and California Constitutions."

## **MISC**

### **New Pay Equity Reporting Requirements In California Are Due Soon**

In September of last year, Governor Newsom signed SB 973, California's first statutory employee data reporting requirement. SB 973 became codified as section 12999 of the California Government Code. The bill was authored by Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson, who also authored [California's Fair Pay Act](#) (SB 358). The stated purpose of the bill is to achieve equal pay for women and persons of color.

To that end, private employers with **100 or more employees** (anywhere in the US) that are required to file an annual Employer Information Report (EEO-1) under federal law must submit a "pay data report" to the Department of Fair Employment & Housing ("DFEH") for the prior calendar year (reporting year). This report is due by March 31, 2021, and on or before March 31 every subsequent year. The portal will become available on 2/15/21, and a data template will be available to the public by 2/1/21. Links to the portal, user guide and the sample will be found [here](#). The data must be made available in a format like Excel that allows the department to search and sort the information using readily available software. DFEH has published a pay data reporting FAQ, which is available by clicking [here](#).

## **WHAT WE'RE READING**

## **LA County Calls COVID-19 'Worst Disaster' In Decades As Virus Continues To Spin Out Of Control**

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to spin out of control in Los Angeles County, health officials on Monday warned residents that despite pandemic fatigue, now is the time to "stay home as much as possible." To read the full story, click [here](#).

## **Here's What a UCLA Study Says Mask Mandates Could Do for the US GDP**

Implementation of a nationwide mask mandate, combined with complementary public health measures, could reduce the coronavirus' spread to essentially zero and have a potential \$1 trillion impact on the US GDP, according to [UCLA Fielding School of Public Health](#) researchers. The team's research "makes clear that even as vaccines are developed and new variants, like B.1.7.7, are being discovered, the power to protect ourselves remains in our hands, as individuals," said co-author Anne Rimoin, a UCLA Fielding School professor of epidemiology. To read the full story, click [here](#).

## **Mexico Sees Holiday Bump In Tourism Amid Pandemic Surge**

The friends from Jackson, Mississippi, relaxed on lounge chairs dug into a white sand beach and romped in the turquoise Caribbean waters, grateful for a break from the pandemic winter in the United States. They were among tens of thousands of American tourists who descended on Mexico's glittering Caribbean beaches at the close of 2020 and start of this year. Quintana Roo state, the country's tourism crown jewel, home to Cancun, the Riviera Maya and Tulum, received 961,000 tourists during that stretch — nearly half from the US — down only 25% from the previous year. To read the full story, click [here](#).

## **'Flying Isn't All That Necessary': Grounded Business Execs Express Relief At Suspension Of Non-Stop Travel**

Bill Gates has predicted that business travel will halve. The environmental benefits of that are clear: A long-haul flight produces more carbon emissions than the average person generates in a year, according to [analysis by the Guardian](#). But it's also proved much-needed relief for those who have spent their life living out of a suitcase. More than one in five business flyers said traveling for work had a negative impact on their mental health, according to a YouGov study in partnership with travel booking and management provider [NexTravel](#). To read the full story, click [here](#).

## **How Well Does The Vaccine Work? Israel's Real-World Stats Can Be Globe's Guide**

Until now, Israel's speedy coronavirus vaccination rollout has been the source of awe, envy (and some criticism) worldwide. But with the release of preliminary data on how hundreds of thousands of people have responded to the shots, it's also set to be the source of groundbreaking insights expected to help bolster vaccination efforts globally.

Most notably, the data released Tuesday by the Health Ministry shows that the vaccine significantly cut down infection levels among sample sizes even before full protection kicks in after the second of two doses. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **San Francisco's COVID Surge Less Than In December, But Stay-Home Order Remains**

San Francisco's post-December surge is lower than Thanksgiving's, but coronavirus cases continue to rise, city officials said Tuesday, adding that the state's stay-at-home order was likely to last through January. "The rate of increase is not as severe as after Thanksgiving," Mayor London Breed said at a news conference. "This is some good news." Still, she said, the Bay Area remains in a "very difficult" position. The region on Monday saw close to zero capacity in hospital intensive care units. Dr. Grant Colfax, the city's director of public health, said coronavirus cases rose by 70% after Thanksgiving and have risen by 28% since Christmas and New Year's. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Mill Valley Officials Call For Outdoor Dining Exemption From COVID Order**

Mill Valley is the first municipality in California to seek an exemption from the outdoor dining ban under Gov. Gavin Newsom's stay-at-home order designed to curb spread of the Coronavirus. The Mill Valley City Council approved two letters calling on Newsom and county health officials for the exemption, according to the Marin IJ. "We share the concern for the health of our community, and therefore cannot ignore that the Stay Home Order has caused the Mill Valley restaurant community to suffer devastating economic impacts by being limited to take-out service only," reads one of the letters. "Our local restaurant employees are facing tremendous financial strain, experiencing lay-offs, reduced hours and struggling to provide for their families. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Big District Superintendents, Newsom Advisers Remain At Odds On Back To School Plan**

After a meeting Monday with top advisers of Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration, superintendents of two of the largest school districts in California said nothing had changed: Their districts won't pursue \$2 billion in state funding in return for committing by February 1 to send younger students back to school when Covid infection rates fall. Reaching an agreement in under three weeks with employee unions on the conditions for a safe return to in-person instruction, Los Angeles Unified Superintendent Austin Beutner said after the meeting, is "not possible." On Tuesday, the district escalated the dispute, voting unanimously in closed session to sue Newsom over the reopening plan. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **US Chamber Calls For Governments To Fund Rapid Training Programs**

US Chamber of Commerce CEO Tom Donohue said Tuesday that a broad-based economic recovery in 2021 depends on reskilling and supporting workers. The usually conservative Chamber is embracing a radical shift on skills policy. "Our lawmakers should fund rapid training programs to connect the unemployed with jobs in new sectors," Donohue said in a State of American Business address. Employers should take a lead in designing these programs, Donohue said, but said the benefits to workers would be clear-cut: "If we do this right and do it quickly, we will improve the living standard for millions of Americans." To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **California Fighting Endless War With COVID Benefit Fraud. Why State Is A Prime Target**

Months after district attorneys unveiled a prison fraud ring that conned the California Employment Development Department out of an estimated \$2 billion or more, the head of an identity-security firm working for the state says global cyber-criminals are bombarding EDD with fraudulent unemployment claims at a stunning clip. Blake Hall, chief executive of [ID.me](#), said in an interview this week that systems deployed by his company are flagging \$750 million worth of bogus claims each week. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **California Unemployment Fraud Could Top \$9 Billion, Double Previous Estimate, Expert Warns**

At least 10% of unemployment claims may have been fraudulent before controls were installed in October, according to Blake Hall, founder and chief executive of the company [ID.me](#), which has been hired by the state Employment Development Department to weed out fraud. A 10% fraud rate could total \$9.8 billion of the benefits paid from March through September. Much of the fraud in California and other states is coming from organized criminal gangs operating in some 20 foreign countries, including Russia, China, Nigeria, Ghana, Turkey and Bulgaria, Hall said. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **LA Wants To Impose Tougher Enforcement For Mask Violators**

The council unanimously voted to order city attorneys to draft a law that would impose fines and penalties on those who refuse to wear a mask at indoor businesses when requested to do so by management, and on individuals who refuse to wear a mask when "invading someone's personal space."... The City Council also on Wednesday voted 11-3 to encourage city employees who are able to issue administrative citations to target those who violate the city's mask orders. Councilman Paul Koretz's motion asks the appropriate departments to "prioritize the issuance of citations, during the normal course of business, to persons not wearing a mask in public." To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Disneyland To Host Orange County's First Massive Vaccination Site**

Disneyland, which remains closed to visitors, is set to host a massive COVID-19 vaccination site, Orange County officials announced Monday. The theme park property will host what Orange County calls a POD, or large Point-Of-Dispensing site for vaccine distribution. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Charts Show Why Lockdown Is Ending In The Sacramento Region, But Not The Bay Area**

The Greater Sacramento region's available ICU capacity is currently under 10%, but the state's data models project it will hit 19% in the coming weeks. Officials announced Tuesday that the region would move back into the purple reopening tier — the tightest of the four, but less restrictive than the ICU-based lockdown. The state bases its evaluations on regions, rather than by individual county, because hospital systems rely on one another for patient transport and other support, said Dr. Nancy Williams, health officer for El Dorado County. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **One LA County Hospital ICU Is Operating At Triple Its Capacity Amid COVID-19 Surge**

The intensive care unit at one hospital in the South Bay, Memorial Hospital of Gardena, is at 320% occupancy, officials said Wednesday. The 172-bed medical center has been in various levels of "internal disaster status" since March, and the latest coronavirus surge is manifesting in alarming but increasingly familiar ways — including shortages of home oxygen supplies that are delaying the discharge of many COVID-19 patients and keeping beds occupied. Demand for oxygen within the hospital has skyrocketed as well, according to hospital spokeswoman Amie Boersma. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **COVID-19 Small Business Tax Breaks You Need to Know**

While you're probably aware of the small business loans and payroll tax credits that flooded the news cycle in the early days of the pandemic—they aren't the only financial relief available to small business owners. Here are a few tax-saving issues you should explore. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **1 Person Dies Every 6 Minutes: How LA Became The Nation's Largest Coronavirus Hot Spot**

In Los Angeles County, 10 people on average test positive for the [Coronavirus](#) every minute. Every six minutes, someone dies from Covid-19, according to county public health data. The startling figures come as California's most populous county rapidly approaches 1 million confirmed coronavirus cases since the pandemic started last year. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **LA Wants To Cut Red Tape To Make Outdoor Dining Easier For Restaurants**



The Los Angeles City Council voted Tuesday to instruct city agencies and departments to pursue changes that will make it easier for the food and beverage industry to provide outdoor dining amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic, a lot of those who sought to open restaurants or bars complained legitimately about a lot of red tape and delays that they had in obtaining approvals, and a variety of unnecessary outdated requirements," Councilman Bob Blumenfield said. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **COVID Outbreaks Skyrocket at SoCal Supermarkets**

It is one of the few places many of us still go during the pandemic—the grocery store. But beware: the number of COVID-19 outbreaks at Southern California supermarkets continues to skyrocket. The NBC4 I-Team has discovered 146 outbreaks last month alone at supermarkets in the the southern part of LA County and in Orange County, according to data obtained from the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 324. Those numbers include outbreaks at 31 Ralphs stores in the region, 17 Vons, and 16 Albertsons. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **County Sues 18 Businesses For Defying COVID-19 Public Health Orders**

The county has decided to sue 18 businesses continuing to operate indoors despite COVID-19 public health orders restricting such activity. Over the past two weeks, the Board of Supervisors directed county attorneys to proceed with the lawsuits against four restaurants and 14 gyms. Supervisor Bob Huber has voted against suing the local businesses. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **COVID One Year Anniversary: Unknowns Remain About Coronavirus Origins**

The Coronavirus that conquered the world came from a thumb-sized bat tucked inside a remote Chinese cave. Of this much, scientists are convinced. Exactly how and when it fled the bat to begin its devastating flight across the globe remain open questions. In one year, SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, infected 94 million people and killed 2 million, 395,000 of them in the USA. Answers could stop such a calamity from happening again. Researchers in China, under government scrutiny, have been investigating since last January. This month, a World Health Organization delegation of scientists from 10 nations finally was allowed in the country to explore the origins of the virus. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Sheriff's Deputies Bust Underground 'Superspreader' Parties Across LA County**

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department officials continued to crack down on coronavirus "super-spreader" events and underground parties over the weekend as COVID-19 cases soar, the agency announced Sunday. The operation by the LA County Sheriff's Department's Super-Spreader Task Force busted an underground event at 600 Block of West Manchester Avenue in South LA Saturday night, and approximately 167

adults were cited for violating county health orders and released, sheriff's officials said. Another 50 people received warnings and were advised about the order, as well as COVID-19 health and safety measures, the agency said. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **COVID-19 Hospitalizations in LA County Dip as Vaccination Efforts Accelerate**

Los Angeles County is ramping up vaccination efforts in its battle against the Coronavirus, with plans to open five large-scale vaccine sites Tuesday, in addition to the large site opened by the city at Dodger Stadium on Friday and 75 smaller sites the county is already operating. The new centers are located at Six Flags Magic Mountain, Cal State Northridge, the Pomona Fairplex, the LA County Office of Education in Downey and the Forum in Inglewood. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Has California's Surge Of Cases Reached Its Peak?**

The wave of coronavirus outbreaks that swept California and the rest of the country the last two months, filling hospitals and morgues and prompting new rounds of government restrictions, appears to have crested, scientists say — a hopeful sign the worst of the pandemic may be past. As new cases reported by county health departments level off, scientists at the University of Washington who have maintained one of the most widely used and respected computer models for tracking and projecting outbreaks, say new infections peaked over the past week in the US and large states, including California, which has now seen more than 3 million cases. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Local COVID-19 Strain Found In Over One-Third Of Los Angeles Patients**

new strain of the Coronavirus has been found in more than one-third of [COVID-19](#) cases in Los Angeles and may be contributing to the acceleration of the recent surge of cases across Southern California, according to new research from Cedars-Sinai. The strain, which the investigators designated as CAL.20C, is believed to be in part responsible for the dramatic increase in cases over the last two months. The Cedars-Sinai findings did not indicate whether the strain is more deadly than current forms of the Coronavirus. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Diaper Masks, Close Quarters: Fast-Food Restaurants Have Struggled To Protect Workers From COVID-19**

A lack of protective equipment and social distancing and pressure to work at all costs have persisted deep into the pandemic, according to a review of summaries of 1,600 complaints to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration concerning the Coronavirus in the nation's fast-food industry, along with 200 additional accounts found in health department records, lawsuits and news reports. The documents offer an

equally troubling record of regulators who have been slow to intervene. To read the full story, click [here](#).

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