

## Weekly COVID-19 Update From EKA February 24, 2021

COVID-19 deaths in the United States have surpassed 500,000. According to [data](#) from Johns Hopkins University, with over 28 million cases, the US leads the world in both infections and deaths. Despite improving conditions, a widely cited [model](#) from the University of Washington's Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation predicts the US will add nearly 90,000 more deaths by the start of June.

### 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.

## VACCINATION

### When is it my turn to get the COVID-19 vaccine?

While the goal is to vaccinate everyone as soon as possible, initial supplies are limited. The state continues to update its plan for fair distribution, ensuring those most at risk get the vaccine first. It's estimated that summer 2021 is the earliest vaccine accessible to the general public who are not included in one of the priority tiers.

### LA County

LA County is actively vaccinating healthcare workers, staff and residents at long-term care facilities, and residents 65 years or older. Eligible residents, currently included in Phase 1A, Tier 1 of the [State Vaccine Allocation Guidelines](#), with internet access and a computer are urged to use the [Vaccinate LA County website](#) to reserve an appointment. For those without access to the internet or with disabilities, a call center is open daily from 8 AM to 8:30 PM to help schedule appointments; dial (833) 540-0473 if you are in need of assistance. Please note that this phone line is reserved for people with disabilities or for those who don't have internet access. The next phase is Phase 1B Tier 1 of the [State Vaccine Allocation Guidelines](#): Education and Childcare workers, Food and Agriculture workers, and Emergency Services workers. LA County anticipates rolling the vaccine out to these workers on March 1. Nearly 1,541,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been given out in LA County. Of those vaccinated, 399,642 people have received second doses. This means 5.1% of the County's population of those 16 and older have now been fully vaccinated. 39% of residents 65 and older have received at least one dose of the vaccine. The vaccines are safe, effective and prevent serious illness. Register on the [MyTurn website](#) to be notified when you're eligible to receive your vaccination.

### Long Beach

The Long Beach Unified School District has announced that K-5 instruction will begin on March 29. All K-5 teachers and school staff will have had an opportunity to be vaccinated with both doses before reopening. Teachers and staff deserve to be vaccinated and safe. LBUSD has also made it clear that any families who wish to keep kids home for the semester and continue online learning will be able to do so. Reopening of the schools and the timing of the opening is up to the school district, and they are working closely with the City Health Department to follow all CDC and State guidelines. The City promised that they would vaccinate our teachers. For more information from LBUSD, [click here](#).

### **LAUSD Plans Large-Scale Vaccinations for Teachers and School Staff**

A large-scale coronavirus vaccination site opening on the grounds of Inglewood's SoFi Stadium could serve to vaccinate teachers and school staff as Los Angeles charts a path to reopening classrooms, it was announced Wednesday. The site at the NFL stadium will be a collaborative operation that includes the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Rams, Hollywood Park, and Inglewood. The location could serve to vaccinate teachers and school staff in Los Angeles County for schools that wish to participate, according to a LAUSD statement. The school district said it plans to work closely with the County on this program and seek approval to begin operating as soon as possible. The site would have the capacity to vaccinate up to 10,000 people a day, the LAUSD said. The LAUSD and its partners, including Anthem Blue Cross and Cedars-Sinai, sent a letter to County Department of Public Health Director Dr. Barbara Ferrer and LA County Office of Education Superintendent Dr. Debra Duardo seeking authorization to operate the site. Under the plan, 600 LAUSD school nurses and other licensed healthcare professionals would administer the vaccine. In addition, Anthem would provide volunteer clinical personnel to supplement LAUSD staff. Cedars-Sinai is already providing training to support this vaccination effort.

### **Pfizer Coronavirus Vaccine Protects Against UK, South Africa Variants, Study Shows**

The vaccine developed by Pfizer appears to be effective against the more transmissible variants of the coronavirus, including the one first discovered in South Africa, according to [a new report](#) in the New England Journal of Medicine. Researchers at Pfizer and the University of Texas Medical Branch genetically engineered versions of COVID-19 to carry some of the mutations found in the variant discovered in South Africa and tested them against blood samples taken from 15 people who had received both doses of the virus vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech. In [a separate study](#) of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine in the journal, researchers found that the vaccine was effective against neutralizing the variant found in the UK but showed a significant decrease in antibodies against the South African strain by a factor of 6.4 compared to levels produced against earlier versions of the virus. Based on the results, researchers concluded that protection against the strain by the Moderna vaccine "remains to be determined."

### **Fully Vaccinated Individuals Need Not Quarantine After Exposure**

The CDC's guidelines state that individuals should quarantine for 14 days after contact with someone with COVID-19, which can be reduced to 10 days if no symptoms developed after exposure. Now that vaccines are becoming more widely available, employers are asking whether the quarantine period can be shortened or eliminated for their workers who have received the vaccine. The CDC has stated that the quarantine period can be eliminated entirely for a fully vaccinated individual who meets all criteria – but the guidance is conditioned on the individual meeting all three criteria. The criteria for allowing a vaccinated individual to skip quarantine – and continue working – after exposure to a COVID-19 case, are:

1. Individual has received both doses of a 2-dose vaccine series or one dose of an approved single-dose vaccine
2. Individual has received the final dose in the series at least two weeks ago, but not more than three months ago
3. Individual has remained symptom-free since the last known exposure to COVID-19.

The CDC's recommendation to waive quarantine for people with vaccine-derived immunity aligns with its [quarantine recommendations](#) for individuals with natural (post-infection) immunity. The CDC also advises that fully vaccinated persons who do not quarantine should monitor for [symptoms of COVID-19](#) for 14 days following exposure and continue to follow [current guidance](#) to protect themselves and others, including wearing a mask, maintaining social distance, covering coughs and sneezes, washing hands often, following [CDC travel guidance](#). Likewise, the CDC does not exempt vaccinated persons from following any applicable workplace or school guidance, including the use of proper personal protective equipment or routine COVID testing. However, when requiring employees to return to work, employers should be mindful that they comply with the more restrictive state and local regulations applicable to their workplaces. As of this writing, the Cal OSHA published FAQs states that its [Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (including a return to work protocol after an exposure) currently must still be followed for vaccinated persons, but “[t]he impacts of vaccines will likely be addressed in a future revision to the ETS” – hopefully soon.

### **When Will Kids, Teenagers Get Vaccinated**

COVID-19 vaccines are in short supply and kids are last in line to get shots. With few exceptions, they're not expected to get vaccines until next September. And that's for high schoolers. Young children may not be eligible until next year. Dr. Anthony Fauci said in an interview with ProPublica, “We're in the process of starting clinical trials in what we call [age de-escalation](#), where you do a clinical trial with people 16 to 12, then 12 to 9, then 9 to 6.” The American Academy of Pediatrics sent a letter to [federal officials](#) at the FDA and Health and Human Services expressing their concerns about the delay in protecting children, as they are also susceptible to COVID-19.

## **REOPENING**

### **HS Sports are Making a Faster Comeback Under New CADPH Guidelines**

The California Department of Public Health (CADPH) [released updated sports guidelines](#). The CADPH outlines that “Outdoor high-contact sports can be played in counties in the purple or red tier with a case rate at or below 14 per 100,000.” Once they start actually playing, the state will require all coaches and athletes to be tested once a week, and according to the CADPH, the state will be paying for those tests. These new guidelines go into effect on February 26, making for a quicker return of high-contact sports like football, soccer, and water polo. However, indoor sports, as of right now, must remain in their current tier system. Counties reaching the threshold in Southern California including Los Angeles (12.3), Orange (11.9) and San Luis Obispo (9.4). Counties not reaching the threshold are Ventura (16.9), San Bernardino (15.2), Riverside (16.6) and Santa Barbara (16.9). Now it’s up to individual schools and districts to decide what sports to allow. For football and water polo, weekly testing of athletes and coaches is required, with results made available within 24 hours of playing in a game.

### **Long Beach Schools To Begin K-5 Instruction On March 29**

The Long Beach School District will resume K-5 instruction starting March 29. Mayor Robert Garcia announced on social media, “All teachers and school staff will have had an opportunity to be vaccinated with both doses before reopening. Long Beach began vaccinating teachers and school staff in late January, ahead of Los Angeles County due to the City having its health department. Los Angeles County public health officials said the County would open vaccinations to the next eligible group, including teachers and school staff, starting March 1. However, LA County Public Health Director Dr. Barbara Ferrer said that the lack of vaccine supply would create a stressful situation for March and hoped that April would see more progress on the supply side.

## **LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

### **Hazard Pay**

Los Angeles County now requires grocery and drug retail companies in unincorporated areas of the County to pay frontline workers an additional \$5 per hour hazard, or “hero pay,” amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 yesterday to adopt the ordinance, which takes effect immediately and stays in place for the next 120 days.

### **Court System Struggles With Backlog**

Los Angeles County Superior Court is struggling to figure out how to operate amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The courts have instituted safety and health protocols, but while some trials have been allowed to be held, others have been postponed, creating a large backlog of cases. The Superior Court system is up and running with modifications, including many health and safety protocols, including enhanced cleaning; a mandatory mask and social

distancing requirements; an order that restricts access to our courthouses to promote social distancing; installing plexiglass in nearly 8,000 locations in courtrooms and courthouses; the need to make appointments for in-person Clerk's Office and Self-Help services; remote courtroom appearance technology; telework for many employees; and reduced calendars, etc.

## SACRAMENTO

### **Californians With Low Incomes To Receive \$600 Checks**

Gov. Gavin Newsom and legislative leaders announced that they have agreed to provide low-income Californians a \$600 state stimulus payment to help them weather financial hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic, part of a \$9.6-billion economic recovery package that also includes \$2.1 billion in grants for small businesses. The "Golden State stimulus" payments provided under the state proposal, which will be expedited for legislative approval next week, are in addition to the \$600-per-person stimulus checks already approved by Congress and would be on top of direct payments of up to \$1,400 per person that have been proposed by House Democrats. Key provisions include:

- **Immediate Relief for Small Businesses**  
Provides \$2.1 billion – a four-fold increase over the \$500 million currently being distributed – for grants up to \$25,000 for small businesses impacted by the pandemic and allocates \$50 million of this total for nonprofit cultural institutions.
- **Fee Waivers for Heavily Impacted Licensees**  
Two years of fee relief for roughly 59,000 restaurants and bars licensed through the state's Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control that can range annually from \$455 to \$1,235. The action also reflects fee relief for more than 600,000 barbering and cosmetology individuals and businesses licensed through the Department of Consumer Affairs.
- **More Resources for Critical Child Care**  
Addition of just over \$400 million in new federal funds to provide stipends of \$525 per enrolled child for all state-subsidized child care and preschool providers serving approximately 400,000 children in subsidized care statewide. The new federal resources will extend care for children of essential workers through June of 2022, and funds increased access to subsidized child care for more than 8,000 children of essential workers and at-risk children – who are not currently served in the system – through June of 2022.
- **Additional Aid for Individuals and Families**  
Provides an additional \$24 million for financial assistance and services through Housing for the Harvest – a program providing support for agricultural workers who

have to quarantine due to COVID-19. The effort also provides a combined \$35 million for food banks and diapers.

- **Emergency Financial Relief to Support Community College Students**  
Provides an additional \$100 million in emergency financial aid for qualifying low-income students carrying six or more units, with award amounts to be determined locally and made available by early April. In addition, the agreement provides \$20 million to reengage students who have either left their community college studies because of the pandemic or to engage students at risk of leaving.
- **CalFresh Student Outreach and Application Assistance**  
Provides roughly \$6 million to support outreach and application assistance to the University of California, California State University and California Community College students made newly eligible for CalFresh – the state-administered federal program for supplemental food assistance. The agreement also provides \$12 million in state funds to support the associated county administrative workload.
- **Restoration of Reductions**  
Restoration of the previously enacted reductions, effective July 1, for the University of California, California State University, the Judicial Branch, Child Support Services and for moderate-income housing.

### **CalChamber Leads Coalition Support for Keep California Working Act**

A coalition of more than 40 business organizations led by the California Chamber of Commerce has announced their support for [SB 74](#), which establishes a \$2.6 billion grant program that offers small businesses a lifeline while struggling to survive pandemic-induced shutdowns and regulations. CalChamber and the coalition members support the measure due to the catastrophic impact that COVID-19 policies are having on the state. California is currently experiencing high unemployment rates, and small businesses in the state have been devastated by shutdowns. SB 74, in conjunction with the Small Business Grants Program Budget proposal and federal aid programs, would assist affected businesses by providing them with a financial bridge until they can fully recover. Specifically, SB 74 would appropriate \$2.6 billion to the Office of Small Business Advocate to award grants to small businesses and nonprofits that have experienced economic hardship resulting from COVID-19. The grant money could be applied toward costs of payroll, rent, health care benefits, sick leave, medical or family leave, reopening, operations, insurance and COVID-19 compliance. SB 74 would award to employers grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$60,000 depending upon certain defined revenue levels. Priority would be given to certain qualified applicants depending upon the geographic impacts of COVID-19, the total financial impact caused by COVID-19, in addition to specified workforce and ownership sectors.

### **New Bill Allows Documentation of COVID in the Workplace**

Chris Micheli is a lobbyist with Aprea & Micheli, as well as an Adjunct Professor of Law at the University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law. In a recent article, Chris wrote that Assemblywoman Laurie Davies introduced [Assembly Bill 757](#) related to the required document of COVID tests and diagnoses. The bill would add Chapter 10 (commencing with Section 1140) to Part 3 of Division 2 of the Labor Code. It includes an urgency clause, so it would be in effect upon approval by the Legislature and the Governor. Chapter 10 would be entitled, "Documentation of COVID-19 Test or Diagnosis."

It would authorize a private employer to request documentation of a positive COVID-19 test or diagnosis if an employee reports that the employee has been diagnosed or tested positive for COVID-19 and is unable to work and that the employer determines that the employee may be subject to a 14-day exclusion from the workplace or under any similar COVID-19 exclusion requirements established in statute or regulation. The bill would provide that an employer, in requesting documentation pursuant to this section and in receiving information in response to that requirement, would have to comply with existing privacy protections. The bill would specify that an employer must consider documentation to be sufficient if it consists of either a positive test or written documentation by a health care provider advising the employee to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19. According to the bill, this measure should be effective immediately to protect businesses that are essential to the preservation of public peace, health, and safety and the state's economic security during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The bill would likely be heard in its first policy committee in late March.

### **California Department of Justice Establishes Worker Rights and Fair Labor Section**

California Attorney General (AG) Xavier Becerra recently announced that he has created the Worker Rights and Fair Labor Section, which will fall under the California Department of Justice's (DOJ) Division of Public Rights. This new section will be tasked with protecting workers against workplace issues such as wage theft, health and safety violations, and employee misclassification. Additionally, it will bolster the enforcement of the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health's (Cal/OSHA) [Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (ETS), which are designed to protect workers from COVID-19. According to an AG office the new section will have a senior assistant AG overseeing the work of supervising deputy AGs and various deputy AGs. As a result, among other things, the increase in personnel handling these matters will significantly strengthen DOJ's capacity to tackle issues involving workers' rights." One of the first tasks of the section will be to defend Cal/OSHA in two lawsuits with respect to the new ETS.

### **What Does This Mean for Employers?**

Employers may want to prepare for heightened scrutiny on issues pertaining to workers' rights. The new section's mandate is to "help bring increased focus and expertise to implement policy and protect against workplace issues ... such as:

- **Wage theft**, working with partner agencies to help address systemic deficiencies that result in workers losing out on the wages they are due, including in instances where businesses fail to pay overtime or allow for meal and rest breaks;
- **Health and safety violations**, stepping up DOJ's ability to tackle current and emerging trends such as those brought on by the coronavirus; and
- **Employee misclassification**, protecting workers from being inappropriately classified as independent contractors, which can allow companies to evade legal obligations such as minimum wage, sick leave, and overtime." [Emphasis in original.]

It is worth noting that President Joe Biden recently nominated Becerra to lead the US Department of Health and Human Services. If the US Senate confirms his nomination, Becerra's replacement will be responsible for following through with the mandate for the new section. Governor Gavin Newsom has not identified a nominee to succeed Becerra.

## NATIONAL

### COVID Relief Bill With 3rd Stimulus Check

The House Budget Committee voted on Monday to advance President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion relief package, setting up the legislation aimed at fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout to go to the House floor for a vote later this week. The package includes direct aid to small businesses, \$1,400 direct checks to Americans making less than \$75,000 annually, an increase in the child tax credit, direct funding to state and local governments and more money for vaccine distribution. The bill also includes funding for schools both at the secondary and higher education level. However, in order for any package to become law it must pass both the House and the Senate. In the Senate, Democratic and Republican staffers will sit down as soon with Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough to hash out whether the \$15 minimum wage is allowed under the budget reconciliation process, which would allow the package to pass with just 50 votes as opposed to 60 votes. MacDonough's decision will determine the outcome of the next steps for Biden's stimulus package and whether a minimum wage increase is included. To read the legislation that is 591 pages, click [here](#).

### Your Guide to Masks

When choosing a mask, look at how well it fits, how well it filters the air, and how many layers it has. Make sure your mask fits snugly against your face. Gaps can let air with respiratory droplets leak in and out around the edges of the mask. Pick a mask with layers to keep your respiratory droplets in and others' out. A mask with layers will stop more respiratory droplets getting inside your mask or escaping from your mask if you are sick. Click [here](#) to read about how your mask protects you. There are [many types of masks](#) you can use to protect yourself and others from getting and spreading COVID-19. Cloth masks can be made from a variety of fabrics, and many types of cloth masks are available. Do not wear cloth masks with exhalation valves or vents, single layer or masks made of thin fabric



that don't block light. Disposable face masks are widely available. Do not wear disposable masks with gaps around the sides of the face or nose, or if wet or dirty.

### **SBA Prioritizes Smallest of Small Businesses in the PPP**

The latest round of Paycheck Protection Program funding opened one month ago and already has succeeded in making major improvements to the program's implementation:

- For businesses with fewer than ten employees, the share of funding is up nearly 60%
- For businesses in rural communities, the share of funding is up nearly 30%
- The share of funding distributed through Community Development Financial Institutions and Minority Depository Institutions is up more than 40%

The SBA will:

- Establish a 14-day, exclusive PPP loan application period for businesses and nonprofits with fewer than 20 employees
- Allow sole proprietors, independent contractors, and self-employed individuals to receive more financial support by revising the PPP's funding formula for these categories of applicants
- Eliminate an exclusionary restriction on PPP access for small business owners with prior non-fraud felony convictions, consistent with a bipartisan congressional proposal
- Eliminate PPP access restrictions on small business owners who have struggled to make federal student loan payments by eliminating federal student loan debt delinquency and default as disqualifiers to participating in the PPP; and
- Ensure access for non-citizen small business owners who are lawful US residents by clarifying that they may use Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) to apply for the PPP.

Borrowers can apply for the Paycheck Protection Program by downloading the [First Draw PPP loan application](#) or [Second Draw PPP loan application](#) and working with a participating PPP lender through the [SBA Lender Match tool](#).

### **US Life Expectancy Drops A Year In Pandemic**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is reporting that life expectancy in the United States dropped one year during the first half of 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic caused its first wave of deaths. Minorities suffered the biggest impact, with Black Americans losing nearly three years and Hispanics, nearly two years, according to preliminary. Other health experts say it shows the profound impact of COVID-19, not just on deaths directly due to infection but also from heart disease, cancer and other conditions. This is the first time the CDC has reported on life expectancy from early, partial records; more death

certificates from that period may yet come in. It's already known that 2020 was the deadliest year in US history, with deaths topping 3 million for the first time.

## **EMPLOYER ISSUES**

### **California Launches COVID-19 Compliance Portal For Businesses**

Grappling with the economic fallout surrounding COVID-19 has been challenging enough for businesses, but how can they ensure they're in compliance with the latest state and local coronavirus-related guidelines? Enter [saferatwork.covid19.ca.gov](https://saferatwork.covid19.ca.gov). The [California Labor & Workforce Development Agency](#) created the online portal as a road map for businesses looking to navigate the ever-changing landscape of COVID-19 safety regulations. The website debuted last week. Business owners or employees who use the portal can access a variety of options, including training and resources, COVID-19 testing, Cal/OSHA's temporary emergency standards and additional information via the Outreach Toolkit. Employers are initially asked which County their business is in and what industry it represents. Companies with multiple operations can select up to six professional activities. Below are a few important COVID-19 workplace rules that employers must follow.

#### **COVID-19 Quarantine Requirements For Employees Updated By Governor's Order**

In December, Gov. Gavin Newsom and, later, the CDPH issued additional guidance, following updated CDC guidance, on quarantine periods for employees exposed to COVID-19. Under the guidelines, employees exposed to COVID-19 (defined as close contact within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative 15 minutes or more over 24 hours), who remain asymptomatic, can end their quarantine and return to work after the 10th day from the date of the last exposure with or without testing. Additionally, health care, emergency response and social services workers can return to work after seven days with a negative PCR test result collected after day 5 when there is a critical staffing shortage. All exposed asymptomatic employees who return from quarantine after less than 14 days must wear a face covering at all times and maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from others, and for those returning after seven days must wear a surgical face mask at all times and self-monitor for symptoms, through day 14.

#### **Employer Obligation to Report COVID-19 Exposure in the Workplace**

Under [AB 685](#), Imminent hazard to employees: exposure: notification: serious violations Employers have new notice and recordkeeping requirements when a COVID-19 infection is confirmed in the workplace. Employers who receive "notice of a potential exposure" from a "qualified individual" are required to provide various notifications to its employees and local health agencies. Most significantly, employers must provide notice within 1 business day to all employees and contractors who were in the same workplace during the infectious period of the COVID-19 case. This notice is broader than the Cal/OSHA required notice because it

requires it to everyone in the same workplace, not only close contacts. The law grants the [California Division of Occupational Safety and Health](#) the new authority to shut down workplaces if employees are deemed to face an “imminent” hazard of COVID-19 infection. The workplace reporting requirements laid out expire January 1, 2023.

### **Workers’ Compensation Presumption for COVID-19 Contracted in the Workplace**

Under [SB 1159](#) Workers’ compensation: COVID-19: critical workers SB 1159, which took immediate effect in September, extended the COVID-19 presumptions that were contained in the now-expired [Executive Order N-62-20](#) issued in May. The law created a rebuttable presumption that certain employees who have contracted COVID-19 did so in the workplace for purposes of receiving workers’ compensation benefits. This presumption extends to employees who reported to work between March 19 and July 5 and tested positive within 14 days of reporting to work; first responders and health care workers diagnosed with COVID-19 after working on or after July 6 and employees diagnosed with COVID-19 after their workplace had an “outbreak” on or after July 6.

### **Personal protective equipment: health care employees**

Under [AB 2537](#), responding to the stockpile shortage and significantly high risk of exposure to COVID-19 faced by frontline workers and health care professionals, AB 2537 requires general acute care hospitals to provide personal protective equipment to employees administering direct patient care or whose services directly support such care. Starting April 1, 2021 (and subject to limited exceptions), these employers are required to maintain a stockpile of items including, but not limited to, N95 masks, surgical masks, isolation gowns, eye protection and shoe coverings, in an amount equal to three months of normal consumption. These employers must implement written procedures that determine the quantity and types of PPE used in their normal consumption. They must also be prepared to report these reports as well as their highest 7-day average of consumption of PPE in the 2019 calendar year upon request to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health. Also, upon request, employers must provide the content of their stockpile inventory to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health. Those who fail to maintain the requisite stockpile will be penalized up to \$25,000 for each violation, except in certain circumstances.

## **WHAT WE’RE READING**

### **Pfizer Vaccine Vials Hold Some Extra Doses — Experts Say That’s Normal**

The small glass vials used to transport Pfizer-BioNTech’s Covid-19 vaccine hold more than the expected five doses — and that’s OK. The Food and Drug Administration said Wednesday night that it was aware of reports that vials were yielding six and sometimes

seven doses, and that it was acceptable to use all full doses from each vial. “At this time, given the public health emergency, FDA is advising that it is acceptable to use every full dose obtainable (the sixth, or possibly even a seventh) from each vial, pending resolution of the issue,” the agency [said in a tweet](#). To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Fauci More Cautious On COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout, Pushing ‘Open Season’ To Late May Or June**

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the US government’s top infectious-disease expert, offered on Tuesday a more cautious note about when vaccines might be more fully available across the country. Last week, Fauci said the country could see “open season” for COVID-19 vaccine doses by April. However, in an appearance on “LA Times Today,” he said the timeline may be more like “late May and early June.” To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Poll: 4 In 5 Inland Voters Favor Requiring Masks To Fight Coronavirus**

Four in five Inland voters support requiring face coverings inside public spaces, according to a new poll that finds widespread support for [coronavirus](#) restrictions in a region where anti-mask sentiments and elected officials’ objections to state COVID-19 orders have been well-publicized. The late January poll from UC Berkeley’s [Institute of Governmental Studies](#) and [Othering & Belonging Institute](#) also found strong support for temporarily limiting restaurants to offering take-out and delivery orders only and restricting places of worship to outdoor-only services. The institute’s stated goal is identifying and eliminating “barriers to an inclusive, just, and sustainable society in order to create transformative change.” To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Five Days A Week: Biden Recommits To His Goal For Reopening K-8 Schools**

President Joe Biden made clear Tuesday his goal is for most K-8 public schools to be open in-person “five days a week” by the end of his first 100 days in office after the White House received widespread criticism for scaling the target back last week. “No, that’s not true,” Biden said at CNN’s town hall in Milwaukee when asked why the White House lowered his goal to just one day of in-person schooling a week. “That’s what was reported. It was a mistake in the communication.” To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Who’s ‘Essential’? COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Leaves High-Risk Workers Behind**

Millions of frontline workers in California are falling through the cracks of an undersupplied COVID-19 vaccine distribution system, putting entire communities at prolonged risk of illness and raising the question among workers: Who counts as “essential,” and who gets to decide? To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Coronavirus Pandemic Has Overshadowed Gun Safety Efforts, Study Finds**

The coronavirus pandemic has put countless legislative efforts on hold throughout the past year, and gun legislation in states is no exception. And while lawmakers’ attention was focused elsewhere, gun violence was on the rise in 2020, according to a new report. “There

is a sad truth here, which is that even when there's a new crisis to deal with, like COVID, other life-threatening emergencies don't just go away," says Laura Cutilletta, managing director of Giffords Law Center. "In fact, they tend to amplify each other. And that's what has happened with the COVID epidemic and the gun violence epidemic." To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Big Newsom Donors — Including Blue Shield — Received No-Bid Contracts During COVID-19 Response**

A CapRadio investigation found an overlap of at least a half-dozen companies that made substantial contributions to Newsom and received no-bid contracts from the state, influential appointments, or other opportunities related to the state's pandemic response. The contributions range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars. The contracts range from \$2 million to over \$1 billion — including the one awarded to Blue Shield for vaccine distribution made public Monday, worth up to \$15 million. To improve transparency, the state created a website that lists COVID-19 contracts worth \$250,000 or more. Of the 100-plus contracts listed — many awarded with limited or no competitive bidding — CapRadio found the vast majority of those companies did not make major contributions to Newsom before or after. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **With Virus Numbers Improving, California Could Reopen More**

California created a four-tiered reopening system last summer that controls how businesses and schools must operate and sets guidelines for personal gatherings. By next week, a "substantial" number of counties are likely to enter the "red" tier, which allows indoor dining at 25% capacity, and the opening of other indoor spaces such as movie theaters, museums and gyms with limits, Newsom said. A half dozen rural counties in Northern California and along the Sierra Nevada mountain range are already in the red or orange tier. State data indicates at least five small counties are moving toward the red tier. The more populous counties will take longer. Los Angeles County public health director Barbara Ferrer said if positive trends continue, the County could move out of the purple tier and into the red "by the time we get into the spring." To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Pandemic Surprise: California Pay Raises Outpace US Average**

The quarterly Employment Cost Index, a federal yardstick of employee costs, tracks 15 large job markets in the nation — including a 12-county Bay Area region and a five-county area in Southern California. My trusty spreadsheet, loaded with 15 years of these compensation trends, found the typical employer in California's two giant job markets raised total pay in 2020 at a pace exceeding the US average, despite the state's pandemic-scarred economy. In the Bay Area, increases in total compensation averaged 3.4% last year — fourth-best among the 15 local markets tracked. Southern California averaged 3.35% increases in 2020 — No. 5 of 15. A nationwide index showed 2.63% average increases. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Why Personal Debt Looks Healthy Despite Worst Year For Jobs**

Economists and financial researchers across the country aren't seeing tell-tale signs of financial hardship in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's reports of American consumer debt, like the devastating spikes in defaulted debt, bankruptcies and foreclosures suffered during the Great Recession. In fact, they're seeing near-record lows. But looks can be deceiving. The large gains of well-off Californians appear to be cloaking the experiences of suffering segments in debt records that aren't easily broken down by race, income or geography. Plus, millions of Californians suffering job losses have accumulated crippling levels of debt that go uncounted in many national measures: unpaid rent, utility bills, borrowed money from loved ones and, in some cases, predatory loans. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Newsom: California School Reopening Talks 'Stubborn' With 'More Work To Do'**

Gov. Gavin Newsom conceded Tuesday that he has not yet struck a school reopening deal with legislators and school groups after having said it could arrive last week. "We are making progress and it is stubborn, the negotiation, and we continue to negotiate," Newsom said, adding that "on schools, we still have more work to do." ... Newsom had hinted at being able to announce a breakthrough last Friday, but the day came and went without a deal. Vaccinations remain a key stumbling block. Teachers unions have fought for educators to have access to vaccines as a precondition for in-person learning. Newsom has argued that goal is unrealistic given finite supply and has pointed to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance saying it is safe for schools to reopen prior to full staff inoculation. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **California Teachers Union Launches Ads On School Reopening Risks**

The California Teachers Association launched television ads this week warning that Covid-19 is "still a threat" and that schools should not open without a focus on teacher vaccinations and other safety protocols as Gov. Gavin Newsom and school employee unions remain at odds over returning to campuses. The emergence of campaign-style ads added a new dimension during ongoing talks that Newsom described Monday as "stubborn." The Democratic governor is pushing to open schools across California, where the vast majority of 6 million public schoolchildren have remained in distance learning for almost a year. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Number Of 'Significantly Disengaged' Kids At Sacramento Public Schools Has Skyrocketed During The Pandemic**

Almost a thousand K-12 students at Sacramento City Unified are "significantly disengaged," meaning they are connecting with the school system just two days a week or less, according to data from the district. The school district says 2.25% of approximately 42,000 enrolled students are logging into class, submitting an assignment, or otherwise interacting with the school system just 40% of the time, at the most. In December of 2019, just 0.16% of the student population was attending at such low levels. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Millions Of Jobs Probably Aren't Coming Back, Even After The Pandemic Ends**

Millions of jobs that have been shortchanged or wiped out entirely by the [coronavirus](#) pandemic are unlikely to come back, economists warn, setting up a massive need for career changes and retraining in the United States. The coronavirus pandemic has triggered permanent shifts in how and where people work. Businesses are planning for a future where more people are working from home, traveling less for business, or replacing workers with robots. All of these modifications mean many workers will not be able to do the same job they did before the pandemic, even after much of the US population [gets vaccinated](#) against the deadly virus. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Did LA'S COVID-19 Hospital Surge Cause Unnecessary Deaths? 'The Public Deserves An Answer.'**

During the worst moments of the autumn-and-winter coronavirus surge in Southern California, doctors and nurses frantically trying to save patients at overcrowded hospitals made terrifying warnings about what they were seeing. "Everything is such a disaster now," one doctor at an LA County hospital said in January. "Patients are dying due to a lack of staffing and lack of attention." To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **California Makes It Easier For High School Sports To Return To Competition**

The California Department of Public Health made significant updates to its guidelines for youth and high school sports on Friday, paving the way for counties and school districts to start planning for multiple sports in the coming days and weeks, including high school football, if certain health conditions and safety protocol are met. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **California Lawmakers, Governor At Odds On School Reopening**

After weeks of tense negotiations, California's legislative leaders agreed Thursday on a \$6.5 billion proposal aimed at getting students back in classrooms this spring following months of closures because of the pandemic. But the plan does not have the blessing of Gov. Gavin Newsom, who said Thursday it "doesn't go far enough or fast enough." Should Newsom veto it, the Legislature would need two-thirds of both chambers to override him. That has not happened since 1979. ... The state can't force California school districts to reopen. But it can offer districts lots of new money as an incentive to resume in-person instruction. In December, Newsom announced a plan that would give \$2 billion to districts that reopen by February. That plan was heavily criticized by school officials. The "Safe and Open Schools Plan" that legislative leaders announced Thursday gives schools more time and more money for reopening than was included in Newsom's plan. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **California Leaders Rely On Winter Tax Boon For Covid Spending Deal**

Gov. Gavin Newsom and state lawmakers are relying heavily on California's winter revenue boost to cover an additional \$5.1 billion of spending in their new \$9.6 billion Covid-19 relief

package. It is exceedingly rare for California leaders to agree to a midyear spending increase that size, and the unprecedented nature of their agreement reflects the enormity of the pandemic problems. The deal also shows just how fortunate California has been to receive record tax revenues while the nation is in a recession and unemployment rates remain at historically high levels. Besides providing aid to millions of residents, the deal gives Newsom a February win as he faces a serious recall threat and frustration over school closures and the vaccine rollout. To read the full story, click [here](#).

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### **Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine Is Highly Effective After One Dose and Can Be Stored in Normal Freezers, Data Shows**

The Covid-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer Inc. and BioNTech SE generates robust immunity after one dose and can be stored in ordinary freezers instead of at ultracold temperatures, according to new research and data released by the companies. The findings provide strong arguments in favor of delaying the second dose of the two-shot vaccine, as the UK has done. They could also have substantial implications on vaccine policy and distribution around the world, simplifying the logistics of distributing the vaccine. A single shot of the vaccine is 85% effective in preventing symptomatic disease 15 to 28 days after being administered, according to a peer-reviewed study conducted by the Israeli government-owned Sheba Medical Center and published in the Lancet medical journal. Pfizer and BioNTech recommend that a second dose is administered 21 days after the first. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Biden To Announce \$4 Billion For Global COVID-19 Vaccine Effort**

President Biden is set on Friday to announce a total of \$4 billion in contributions to COVAX, the vaccine alliance trying to distribute COVID-19 vaccines to 92 low- and middle-income countries, a senior administration official told reporters. Biden will make the announcement during a virtual meeting of G-7 leaders about the pandemic. The funding for the program — which is co-run by the World Health Organization — includes an initial contribution of \$2 billion that Congress appropriated in December. That funding should go out by the end of the month, the official said. In addition, Biden will pledge another \$2 billion through 2021



and 2022. The first \$500 million of that pledge will be available “rather quickly” to help spur other donations, the official said. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **It’s ‘Double Time’ For US Vaccinators After A Week Of Winter Storm Delays**

The brutal winter weather delayed the delivery of hundreds of thousands of doses across the country just as vaccine distribution was beginning to gather steam in the United States. Part of the problems is that the storms affected a FedEx facility in Memphis and a UPS facility in Louisville, Ky. — both vaccine shipping hubs. Jennifer Psaki, the White House press secretary, said Thursday the Biden administration was working closely with manufacturing and shipping partners to assess weather conditions. Shipment delays have been reported in California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Utah and Washington, among other states, forcing vaccine sites to temporarily shutter and coveted appointments to be rescheduled. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Covid-19 Mask Mandates End In Some States, Fueling Tensions**

As Covid-19 cases fall and vaccines roll out across the country, a handful of governors have dropped statewide mask mandates, raising tensions with some city leaders who are keeping their own restrictions in place to fight new strains of the coronavirus. Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds this month dropped the state’s mask mandate and restrictions on social gatherings, after case counts and hospitalizations had fallen by around 80% since the autumn peak and vaccination programs in nursing homes and assisted-living facilities got under way. ... Des Moines, Dubuque, Iowa City and several other cities have no plans to follow the governor’s lead on dropping the face-covering mandate. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **US Sticking With Two-Dose COVID-19 Vaccine Schedule, Though Study Suggests One Shot Provides Good Short-Term Protection**

A new study out of Israel reignited the public debate Friday about the spacing between the two doses of COVID-19 vaccine, but the US government isn’t budging in its commitment to the original schedule. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine might be just as effective if the gap between doses is wider than the recommended 21 days, according to the new study from Israel. If the doses could be given further apart, more people could be protected faster. Vaccine supplies, which remain quite limited now, are expected to ramp up in late spring. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Fauci Cautions Against Complacency As Covid Infections Decrease, Warns Daily Case Level Remains High**

Dr. Anthony Fauci warned Americans to steel themselves against a sense of Covid-19 complacency even as coronavirus infections plummet and some scientists predict that herd immunity is just around the corner. “The slope that’s coming down is really terrific — it’s very steep, and it’s coming down very, very quickly. But we are still at a level that’s very high,” Fauci said on NBC’s “Meet the Press” he didn’t want people to think that just because

the slope of infections was in sharp decline that “we’re out of the woods now.” To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **‘A Lot Of People Say They’re Afraid.’ COVID-19 Vaccine Fears Plague California Farmworkers**

As California ramps up its COVID-19 vaccine distribution efforts, some advocates worry farmworkers will be left behind unless support for the vaccine within the agricultural community increases. But that can only happen with the help of grassroots organizations and trusted leaders who can conduct targeted outreach through education campaigns, they argue. To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **Unemployed Californians Face Months Of Delays When Appealing Denial Of Jobless Benefits**

Californians who believe their unemployment benefit claims have been wrongly denied are facing significant delays in having their appeals addressed during the COVID-19 pandemic, waiting an average of 92 days for assistance — more than double the wait time before the pandemic put millions of residents out of work. The sluggish appeals process marks another setback for the state after its beleaguered Employment Development Department was overwhelmed by a record-setting 20 million filings since the pandemic began, leading to state audits that showed poor planning by the agency slowed the approval of millions of claims and made it vulnerable to widespread fraud.

To read the full story, click [here](#).

### **California Coronavirus Variant Possibly More Infectious, Might Cause More Serious Illness, SF Studies Show**

Scientists at the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub and UCSF looked at positive test results in the Mission District and found that about 35% of household members became infected when one case of the California variant was brought into the home; the attack rate for other variants was about 26%. Separately, a study by Dr. Charles Chiu at UCSF also found evidence that the variant is more infectious. In addition, his team found that people infected with the variant were more likely to end up in intensive care or die. And lab tests showed the variant was less responsive to antibodies produced by people who had previously been infected. It’s not clear from the results whether the variant is less responsive to vaccines. To read the full story, click [here](#).

**Note:** While EKA monitors governmental announcements, guidelines and recommendations, our updates are prepared for informational purposes and are compiled from publicly available sources. Our updates should not be considered health, medical, legal, or tax advice. Always consult a qualified professional regarding any specific questions you may have. All hyperlinks are live and will bring you to the information mentioned. If you are not interested in receiving future emails from us, then please reply with a “Remove” in the subject line and note the email addresses to be removed.

