

Health officers sound alarm as California economy reopens

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Health officials in a San Francisco Bay Area county that was among the most aggressive in the nation in shutting down its economy to slow the

spread of the coronavirus are warning of "worrisome" growing infections as California on Tuesday reported its highest daily infection rate to date and hospitalizations from the virus increase.

The state Department of Public Health recorded more than 5,000 new cases Tuesday, putting the total number of positive cases at more than 183,000. The state has seen more than 5,500 deaths related to COVID-19.

The record-setting numbers and warnings come as more businesses reopen statewide, spurred by antsy residents weary over stay-at-home and social distancing orders. San Francisco, which was part of the Bay Area's strict order in mid-March, plans to allow outdoor bars, nail and hair salons and tattoo shops to open next week.

Health officers say they always expected case numbers to creep up as the economy reopens, but they worry the trend may be getting out of hand.

"The question of how we're doing as a nation is: We're not doing so well. How are we doing as a state? Not doing so well. How are we doing as a region? Not doing so well," said Santa Clara County Executive Jeffrey Smith Tuesday. Smith, a doctor, said one widely cited model projects 15,000 Californians could die by October 1.

Santa Clara County, home to Silicon Valley, has recorded the earliest known [coronavirus](#)-related death in the country in February and served as an early virus hot spot. The stay-home order flattened the curve of new infections, said Dr. Sara Cody, the county's public health officer, but "worrisome" signs indicate the increase is accelerating.

She said the county recorded its second-highest number of new daily cases to the state Tuesday, with more cases cropping up at workplaces, including construction sites and food processing centers.

"We've said before that COVID-19 is like a wildfire. If you contain it when it's small you can keep it under control, but once COVID transmissions begin to accelerate, it is very, very difficult to contain and to slow down and I think that's what we're seeing in many parts of the country," she said.

The number of people hospitalized with the coronavirus in California has inched up each of the past several days and now is nearly 3,900, the highest rate since Gov. Gavin Newsom followed the lead of the Bay Area and ordered Californians to stay home in mid-March.

The rising number of cases prompted Yosemite National Park to reverse course on reopening campgrounds through July, two weeks after the park reopened to visitors.

Southern California, with the country's most populous county, remains a stubborn hot spot for the pandemic.

On Tuesday, Los Angeles County reported 34 new COVID-19 deaths and nearly 2,400 new cases. About 1,500 people are currently hospitalized—much lower than the peak when over 1,900 people were hospitalized daily—but still higher than the 1,350 to 1,450 daily hospitalizations seen in recent weeks.

Newsom last week ordered Californians to wear face coverings when out in public, sparking more resistance from residents who say they believe the emergency is over. On Monday he implored Californians to take the virus seriously and wear masks.

In Orange County, scores of residents spoke for more than an hour Tuesday at a Board of Supervisors' meeting about the pandemic and the mask order. People wearing red, white and blue said they refuse to wear face coverings and noted that the state is in the recovery phase from the

virus.

Others, including a doctor wearing a face shield and a masked paramedic, pleaded with the board to implement the governor's mask order, saying they had seen a recent rise in virus cases and were concerned about the spread.

In response to questions from supervisors, Dr. Clayton Chau, the county's interim health officer who earlier this month downgraded a county mask requirement to a recommendation, said there's growing evidence that masks can help stop the spread of the virus.

"Every day you have scientific articles," he said. "There's more evidence that face covering does stop, does slow down the spread of the virus."

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