

# Millions of Californians locked down, UK to start vaccinating

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Southern California went into lockdown Monday putting 20 million people under stay-at-home orders as the United States battles record COVID deaths and Britain readied to vaccinate the elderly and frontline

staff.

California's lockdown forced most offices to close and banned gatherings among different households, while bars and services such as hair salons were shut and restaurants only allowed to serve takeaways.

"We are at a tipping point in our fight against the virus and we need to take decisive action now to prevent California's hospital system from being overwhelmed," governor Gavin Newsom said before the measures took effect.

The United States' floundering efforts to quell the COVID-19 pandemic have been widely criticized, with a daily death toll of over 2,500 for five days in a row last week.

President Donald Trump and senior officials have repeatedly downplayed the risks while ignoring basic public health measures such as mask-wearing and social distancing at mass rallies and White House events.

On Sunday, Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, 76, tested positive for COVID-19, the latest member of his inner circle to contract the disease.

Giuliani, who appears often in public without a mask, tweeted Sunday that he was "getting great care and feeling good" after reportedly being hospitalized.

The former New York mayor has been crisscrossing the country, leading Trump's unsuccessful effort to undo Joe Biden's victory in the November 3 election.

## **Race for vaccine**

Biden on Monday vowed that his incoming administration would be "ready on day one to mobilize every resource of the federal government... and restore the belief that there is nothing beyond America's capacity."

When the president-elect takes office on January 20, he will be immediately responsible for an immunization drive set to launch this month in a bid to gain control of a pandemic that has killed 280,000 people in the country.

The US is expected to grant emergency authorization for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines this week and it hopes to vaccinate millions of people by the end of the year.

The world-first rollout of the Pfizer vaccine is due to begin in Britain on Tuesday, with Health Secretary Matt Hancock volunteering to take it live on television to assuage any doubts over its rapid approval.

Croydon University Hospital in south London is one of 50 clinical hubs that started receiving the country's initial consignment of 800,000 doses over the weekend, from a Pfizer plant in Belgium.

"To know that they are here, and we are amongst the first in the country to actually receive the vaccine and therefore the first in the world, is just amazing, I'm so proud," said Louise Coughlan, joint chief pharmacist at the Croydon hospital trust.

First in line will be people aged 80 and over, care home workers, and frontline staff in the National Health Service who are considered at higher risk.

The government is running into technical challenges administering doses away from hospital hubs, given the need for ultra-low storage

temperatures and how the vaccine is packaged.

## Hopes for 2021

Elsewhere, the World Economic Forum said next year's Davos summit would be moved from Switzerland to Singapore, where it will be held in person in May, as the world plans for a tentative return to normal life.

Two Indian pharmaceutical firms—including Serum Institute, the world's biggest manufacturer of vaccines—on Monday sought fast-track approval for coronavirus shots.

The country is the world's second-worst hit by the pandemic after the United States, and has already recorded more than 140,000 deaths.

In the race to get vaccines, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Pfizer and BioNTech will deliver their first doses to Canada within weeks.

With hopes for a regular Christmas shattered, German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged regions with high coronavirus rates to tighten restrictions, while Denmark said it will close middle and high schools, bars, cafes and restaurants in half of the country.

Further south, Greece extended its restrictions until January 7 but Austrians got a boost when the government lifting its measures.

"We couldn't wait with the shopping, even if it might be a bit crowded today," Robert Bauer told AFP as he shopped in Vienna.

New York—a global epicenter of COVID deaths earlier in the year—on Monday reopened public elementary schools, as authorities worldwide try to balance returning to normal life without triggering fresh surges in infection.

US coronavirus task force coordinator Deborah Birx on Sunday pleaded with people to wear masks.

"The vaccine is critical," she said, "but it's not going to save us from this current surge."

The novel [coronavirus](#) has killed at least 1,535,987 people since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP.

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