

California becomes first state to top 3 million virus cases

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In this Jan. 9, 2021, file photo, vials of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine are placed next to a loaded syringe in Throop, Pa. On Sunday, Jan. 17, 2021, California's state epidemiologist Dr. Erica S. Pan recommended providers stop using lot 41L20A of the Moderna vaccine pending completion of an investigation by state officials, Moderna, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the federal Food and Drug Administration, because some people received medical treatment for possible severe allergic reactions. (Christopher Dolan/The Times-Tribune via AP, File)

California on Monday became the first state to record more than 3 million known coronavirus infections.

The grim milestone, as tallied by Johns Hopkins University, wasn't entirely unexpected in a state with 40 million residents but its speed stunning. The state only reached 2 million reported cases on Dec. 24.

The first [coronavirus](#) case in California was confirmed last Jan. 25. It took 292 days to get to 1 million infections on Nov. 11 and 44 days to top 2 million.

California's caseload is also far ahead of other large states. Texas had more than 2 million and Florida topped 1.5 million.

The state has recorded more than 33,600 deaths related to COVID-19.

A caseload surge that began last fall has strained hospitals and especially intensive care units as a percentage of the infected—typically estimated to be around 12% by [public health officials](#)—become sick enough weeks later to need [medical care](#).

On average, California has seen about 500 deaths and 40,000 new cases daily for the past two weeks.

Officials warn that a recent slight downward trend in hospitalizations could reverse when the full impact of New Year's Eve gathering transmissions is felt.

The state is placing its hopes on mass vaccinations to reduce the number of infections but there have been snags in the immunization drive. On Sunday, Dr. Erica S. Pan, the state epidemiologist, urged that providers

stop using one lot of a Moderna vaccine because some people needed medical treatment for possible severe allergic reactions.

More than 330,000 doses from lot 41L20A arrived in California between Jan. 5 and Jan. 12 and were distributed to 287 providers, she said.

In Northern California, Stanislaus County health officials responded by announcing they wouldn't be holding vaccination clinics until further notice.

"Out of an extreme abundance of caution and also recognizing the extremely limited supply of vaccine, we are recommending that providers use other available vaccine inventory" pending completion of an investigation by state officials, Moderna, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the federal Food and Drug Administration, Pan said in a statement.

Fewer than 10 people, who all received the vaccine at the same community site, needed medical attention over a 24-hour period, Pan said. No other similar clusters were found.

Pan did not specify the number of cases involved or where they occurred.

Six San Diego health care workers had allergic reactions to vaccines they received at a mass vaccination center on Jan. 14. The site was temporarily closed and is now using other vaccines, KTGTV-TV [reported](#).

Moderna in a statement said the company "is unaware of comparable adverse events from other vaccination centers which may have administered vaccines from the same lot."

The CDC has [said](#) COVID-19 vaccines can cause side effects for a few days that include fever, chills, headache, swelling or tiredness, "which are normal signs that your body is building protection."



In this Jan. 12, 2021 photo provided by the Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner, National Guard members assisting with processing COVID-19 deaths, placing them into temporary storage at the medical examiner-coroner's office in Los Angeles. The seven-day rolling average of daily deaths is rising in 30 states and the District of Columbia, and on Monday, Jan 18, 2021, the U.S. was approaching 398,000, according to data collected by Johns Hopkins University, by far the highest of any country in the world. (Los Angeles County Department of Medical Examiner-Coroner via AP, File)

However, severe reactions are extremely rare. Pan said in a vaccine similar to Moderna's, the rate of anaphylaxis—in which an immune system reaction can block breathing and cause blood pressure to drop—was about 1 in 100,000.

The announcement came as California counties continue to plead for more COVID-19 vaccine as the state tries to tamp down its rate of infection, which has resulted in record numbers of hospitalizations and deaths.

California has shipped about about 3.2 million doses of the vaccine—which requires two doses for full immunization—to local health departments and health care systems, the state's Department of Public Health reported Monday.

Only about 1.4 million of those doses, or around 40%, have been administered.

So far, the state has vaccinated fewer than 2,500 people per 100,000 residents, a rate that falls well below the national average, according to federal data.

Although Gov. Gavin Newsom announced last week that anyone age 65 and older would be eligible to start receiving the [vaccine](#), Los Angeles County and some others have said they do not have enough doses to vaccinate that many people and are first concentrating on inoculating health care workers and the most vulnerable elderly living in care homes.

The death rate from COVID-19 in Los Angeles County—the nation's most populous and an epicenter of the state pandemic—works out to about one person every six minutes.

On Sunday, the South Coast Air Quality Management District suspended

some pollution-control limits on the number of cremations for at least 10 days in order to deal with a backlog of bodies at hospitals and funeral homes.

"The current rate of death is more than double that of pre-pandemic years," the agency said.

Adding to concerns, California is experiencing new, possibly more transmissible forms of COVID-19.

The state health department announced Sunday that an L452R variant of the virus is increasingly showing up in genetic sequencing of COVID-19 test samples from several counties.

The variant was first identified last year in California and in other states and countries but has been identified more frequently since November and in several large outbreaks in Northern California's Santa Clara County, the department said.

Overall, the variant has been found in at least a dozen counties. In some places, testing has found the variant in a quarter of the samples sequenced, said Dr. Charles Chiu, a virologist and professor of laboratory medicine at the University of California San Francisco.

However, not all test samples receive genetic sequencing to identify variants so its frequency wasn't immediately clear.

Health officials said it was linked to a Christmas-time outbreak at Kaiser Permanente San Jose that infected at least 89 staff members and patients, killing a receptionist. The outbreak has been blamed on an employee who visited the hospital emergency room wearing an air-powered inflatable Christmas tree costume.

The variant is different from another mutation, B117, that was first reported in the United Kingdom and appears to spread much more easily, although it doesn't appear to make people sicker.

That variant has already shown up in San Diego County and Los Angeles County announced over the weekend that it had detected its first case.

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