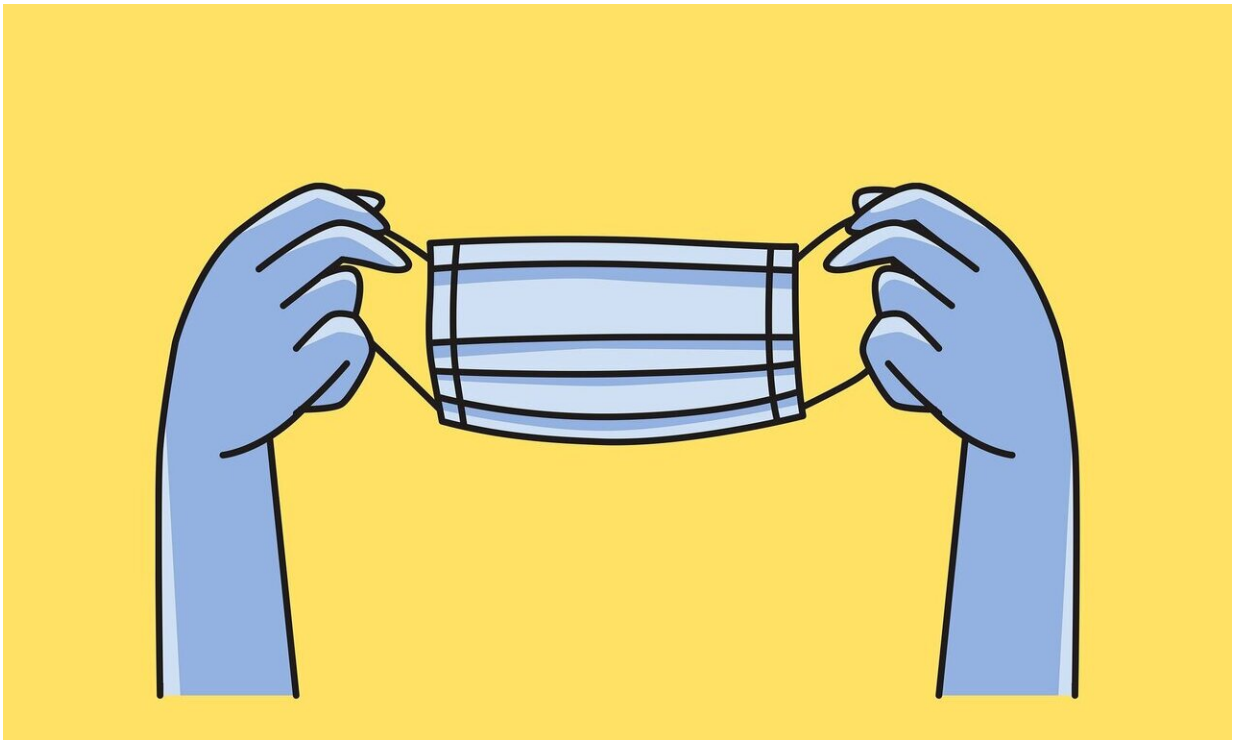


California lifts virus stay-at-home orders, curfew statewide

January 25 2021, by Kathleen Ronayne and John Antczak



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California lifted regional stay-at-home orders across the state Monday in response to improving coronavirus conditions, returning the state to a system of county-by-county restrictions.

The order had been in place in the San Francisco Bay Area, San Joaquin

Valley and Southern California, covering the majority of the state's counties.

The change allows restaurants and churches to resume outdoor operations and hair and nail salons to reopen in many areas, though local officials could choose to impose stricter rules. The state is also lifting a 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew.

"Together, we changed our activities knowing our short-term sacrifices would lead to longer-term gains. COVID-19 is still here and still deadly, so our work is not over, but it's important to recognize our collective actions saved lives and we are turning a critical corner," Dr. Tomas Aragon, the state's public health director, said in a statement.

Gov. Gavin Newsom was expected to address the public later Monday. Public officials in some of California's major cities and counties indicated they could soon lift local restrictions.

"We will be moving forward with some limited re-openings, including outdoor dining and personal services," San Francisco Mayor London Breed said in a tweet.

Orange County planned to lift some restrictions as well, said Jessica Good, a spokesperson for the county health agency. In Los Angeles County, home to 10 million people, Republican Supervisor Kathryn Barger expressed support for opening outdoor dining, personal care services and other industries and said the state must balance public health with "devastating social, emotional and economic impacts of this virus." Los Angeles County public health officials are expected to hold a briefing later Monday.

The state's decision came amid improving trends in California's rate of infections, hospitalizations and data behind the forecasts.

During the weekend, San Francisco Bay Area ICU capacity surged to 23% while the San Joaquin Valley agricultural region increased to 1.3%, its first time above zero. The huge Southern California region, the most populous, remains at zero ICU capacity.

Republicans said Newsom was relaxing the rules in response to political pressure and the threat of a recall. Republican organizers have until mid-March to gather 1.5 million signatures to force a recall against Newsom, who is halfway through his first term.

"This Governor's decisions have never been based on science. Him re-opening our state is not an attempt to help working Californians, but rather an attempt to counter the Recall Movement. It's sad and pathetic," California Republican Party Chairwoman Jessica Millan Patterson tweeted.

The criticism wasn't limited to Newsom's partisan political opponents.

Jeff Smith, the Santa Clara County executive, said his county had no plans to impose stricter rules but criticized the state's decision.

"Essentially it's a decision being made politically that puts people's lives at risk, especially in Southern California," he told The Mercury News.

Democratic Assemblywoman Laura Friedman of Glendale said state lawmakers have been out of the loop on changing rules.

"If you think state legislators were blindsided by, and confused about, the shifting & confusing public health directives, you'd be correct," she tweeted. "If you think we have been quiet about it in Sacramento, you'd be wrong."

Early last year, the state developed a system of color-coded tiers that

dictated the level of restrictions on businesses and individuals based on virus conditions in each of California's 58 counties.

Most counties will now go back to the most restrictive purple tier, which allows for outdoor dining, hair and nail salons to be open, and outdoor church services. Bars that only serve beverages cannot be open.

The county-by-county tier system uses various metrics to determine the risk of community transmission and apply a color code—purple, red, orange or yellow—which correspond to widespread, substantial, moderate and minimal, respectively.

As of the weekend, California has had more than 3.1 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and 36,790 deaths, according to the state's public health website.

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