

Most of California to reopen as vaccine eligibility expands

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Most of California's 40 million residents will be able to enjoy limited indoor activities such as dining inside or watching a movie at a theater by mid-week as coronavirus case rates continue to stay low, state officials

said Friday.

Officials said that 13 counties, including Los Angeles, would be able to open restaurants, gyms and museums at limited capacity on Sunday, the result of the state hitting a 2 million equity metric aimed at getting more vaccines into low-income communities. Another 13 counties are expected to reopen Wednesday under a different metric.

Also next week, the state expands eligibility for the still-scarce vaccine.

WHICH COUNTIES CAN REOPEN SUNDAY AND WHY?

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced last week that he would set aside 40% of vaccine for residents of about 400 ZIP codes the state deems most vulnerable based on metrics such as household income, access to health care and education levels.

The point is to tie reopening standards to ensuring that the people most affected by the pandemic are protected against the virus, he said. Once the state reaches 2 million doses administered in those ZIP codes, which it did Friday, the threshold for moving out of the most restrictive tier in a color-coded, four-tier system the state adopted in August relaxes.

Previously, counties could move from the purple tier to the lower red tier based on metrics that include the number of new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people per day over a period of several weeks. The threshold for entering the red tier now moves from 7 cases per 100,000 residents to 10 cases.

The counties eligible to reopen within 48 hours—Sunday—include Contra Costa and Sonoma in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles. San Bernardino and Orange said it would do so Sunday, although LA County officials said they would wait until Monday.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER COUNTIES?

San Diego, Sacramento, Riverside and Ventura are among 13 additional counties expected to reopen Wednesday via the normal reassignment process that occurs every Tuesday.

San Joaquin and Santa Barbara are in this category. The hard-hit counties of Kern and Fresno in the central valley remain in the most restrictive tier.

WHO BECOMES ELIGIBLE FOR VACCINE MONDAY?

The state is opening up vaccinations to an estimated 4.4 million people ages 16-64 with disabilities and certain health conditions, including severe obesity, type 2 diabetes, chronic kidney disease at stage four or above and Down syndrome.

California's guidelines do not call for medical documentation; instead, people will have to attest that they are eligible. This reduces barriers to access, but it also opens up a loophole for determined line jumpers.

San Francisco is going a step further than the state, broadening the allowed categories and adding people who are deaf, HIV positive or who have behavioral health disabilities, including severe mental health or substance use disorders, to get vaccinated.

Dr. Paul Simon, LA County's chief science officer, said people will be asked to sign an attestation if they can't provide documentation. "We certainly hope people won't try to take advantage of the situation and will be honest," Simon said.

The state is also expanding eligibility to transit workers and residents and workers of homeless shelters, jails and detention centers. They join

teachers, food and agriculture workers, health care employees and seniors 65 and older in being eligible for vaccine.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF CALIFORNIA'S NEW VACCINE SYSTEM?

In late January, Newsom announced insurer Blue Shield would set up and administer a new [vaccine](#) tracking and delivery system. The state's 58 counties and three cities with public health departments would be required to use the state's My Turn system to make appointments.

Blue Shield is expected to take control by March 31. But Santa Clara County has refused to sign a contract with the insurer, saying it can better vaccinate its residents with an appointment system that is superior to the state's system.

Blue Shield CEO Paul Markovich said Friday that more than half of local health jurisdictions have switched to My Turn or will switch soon, he said.

My Turn is great for scheduling appointments at mass vaccination sites, but it is not so good at carving out slots for vulnerable populations at smaller clinics, said Joe Prado, Fresno County's community health division manager. He expects the state online portal to improve.

"We're going to live with these two systems a little while longer," he said.

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