

California plans to lift most pandemic restrictions June 15

April 6 2021, by Janie Har and Amy Taxin



A Los Angeles Traffic control officer directs vehicles to an alternative entrance to the Dodgers Stadium vaccination site in Los Angeles Friday, April 2, 2021. California has administered nearly 19 million doses, and nearly 6.9 million people are fully vaccinated in a state with almost 40 million residents. But only people 50 and over are eligible statewide to get the vaccine now. Adults 16 and older won't be eligible until April 15. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

California plans to lift most coronavirus restrictions on businesses and workplaces June 15, with officials saying enough people should be vaccinated by then to allow for life to almost get back to a pre-pandemic normal.

The mask mandate in the nation's most populated state will stay in effect, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Tuesday, and he cautioned that California will reopen more widely in mid-June only if vaccine supply is sufficient and hospitalization rates stay stable and low.

Still, the Democratic governor, who has overseen some of the most restrictive pandemic rules in the country, said it was time to forge ahead, with 20 million vaccines administered in California to date. The announcement signals an end date to more than a year of isolation after California resisted reopening too quickly even while other states pushed ahead.

"We can confidently say by June 15 that we can start to open up as business as usual, subject to ongoing mask-wearing and ongoing vigilance," Newsom said. "So this is a big day."

The announcement comes as states across the country have lifted health restrictions as more people get vaccinated. California had some of the nation's strictest pandemic rules, becoming the first to institute a statewide stay-at-home order last spring and adopting a complex, color-coded tier system in August that dictated which businesses could open and at what capacity depending on how widespread the virus was in a county.



Governor Gavin Newsom speaks with news reporters at Park de la Cruz Recreation Center on Friday, April 2, 2021 in San Diego about the San Diego's newest pop-up vaccination site in the City Heights neighborhood. (Nelvin C. Cepeda/The San Diego Union-Tribune via AP)

Newsom said he expects 30 million doses to be administered by the end of April, putting them on track to inoculate many of the estimated 32 million people eligible for the vaccine.

The pandemic has taken its toll in California, with more than 58,000 people dead, businesses closed and students who have been out of classrooms for much of the year. Newsom, who has pushed for in-person instruction to resume, said he expects no barriers to getting students back into classrooms safely by June 15, including college students.

Under the plan, businesses can open with "common-sense risk reduction measures," including mandated masking and encouraging vaccinations. The state will continue contact tracing and testing.

Most capacity limits will be lifted, although large-scale indoor events, such as conventions, will be allowed only with testing or vaccination verification requirements, said Dr. Mark Ghaly, the secretary of health and human services.



Fashion designer Josie Vand wears a facemask as she retrieves a bag with organic vegetables from a farm box from County Line Harvest in Los Angeles on Friday, April 2, 2021. California has been easing COVID-19 restrictions as it recovers from a deadly winter surge, although public health officials still urge people to follow social distancing and mask-wearing protocols. Rates of hospitalizations and deaths have plunged, and the rate of people testing positive

for the virus is at a near-record low. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)



In this March 16, 2021 file photo, a sign advertises a restaurant opening in Santa Monica, Calif. California will allow indoor concerts, theater performances and other private gatherings starting April 15, 2021, as the rate of people testing positive for the coronavirus in the state nears a record low. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez,File)

Vaccine eligibility will expand to people in California 16 and older starting April 15, although some counties have already started vaccinating young adults.

The two-month advance notice should give people enough time to schedule their first dose, wait the recommended three to four weeks for a second shot and get through the two-week period for the vaccines to fully kick in, he said.

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