

# California fully reopens after being 1st to shut in pandemic

June 15 2021, by Jocelyn Gecker and Stefanie Dazio

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California Governor Gavin Newsom, left, looks on as Access Hollywood personality Scott Evans draws a ball with a winning number during the Vax for the Win lottery contest at Universal Studios in Universal City, Calif., Tuesday, June 15, 2021. Starting Tuesday, there were no more state rules on social distancing, and no more limits on capacity at restaurants, bars, supermarkets, gyms, stadiums or anywhere else. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu

California, the first state in America to put in place a coronavirus lockdown, has turned a page on the pandemic.

The nation's most populated state lifted most of its restrictions Tuesday, meaning no more state rules on social distancing or capacity limits at restaurants, bars, supermarkets, gyms, stadiums or anywhere else.

And masks—one of the most fraught symbols of the pandemic—are no longer mandated for vaccinated people in most settings, though businesses and counties can still require them.

Gov. Gavin Newsom celebrated the milestone by hosting a lottery-style selection of 10 winners who will get \$1.5 million each simply for being vaccinated. It was the grand finale to the nation's largest vaccine incentive—\$116 million in COVID-19 lottery jackpots and cash card giveaways.

"Finally we are here, June 15th, to turn the page," Newsom declared from a stage at Universal Studios Hollywood during festivities to mark what he called the "full reopening" of the state's economy.

The Democratic governor pointed to the more than 40 million doses of vaccine administered and the resulting plunge in cases as the reason for the reopening.



Silvia Guillen, 19, and her boyfriend Joseph Alvarez, 22, both from El Paso, Texas, share a kiss at Universal Studios in Universal City, Calif., Tuesday, June 15, 2021. On Tuesday, California lifted most of its COVID-19 restrictions and ushered in what has been billed as the state's "Grand Reopening." Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu

"Foundationally, that's why we're here today," Newsom said.

Just in time for summer, California wants to send the message that life is getting much closer to normal. The economy is fully reopen for the first time in 15 months and people can largely return to pre-pandemic lifestyles.

Fans can cheer maskless at Dodgers and Giants baseball games.



Disneyland is opening to all tourists after allowing just California residents since April. People can pack indoor bars and nightclubs from the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles to the Castro in San Francisco.

Tourism was among the hardest hit industries during the pandemic and now wants to make up for lost time.

"In terms of our incredible cities, our iconic attractions, the industry is ready to roll out the red carpet to visitors in California, around the nation and even the world," said Caroline Beteta, president and CEO of Visit California.



People arrive at Universal Studios in Universal City, Calif., Tuesday, June 15, 2021. On Tuesday, California lifted most of its COVID-19 restrictions and ushered in what has been billed as the state's "Grand Reopening." Credit: AP

Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu

Pandemic highs and lows saw California go from being a success story to the U.S. epicenter of the virus. As the first in the country to impose a statewide lockdown in March 2020, California's businesses were just starting to reopen last June when cases started rising and restrictions were imposed again.

By summer's end, a darker reality set in as California hurtled toward a deadly winter surge. Shutdowns, curfews and harrowing images from overwhelmed hospitals became the norm as the state set records almost daily for infections and deaths.

More people tested positive for the virus in California (3.8 million and counting) and more people died (63,000 plus) than anywhere else in the country, although the nation's most populous state had a lower per capita death rate than most others.

California now has one of the lowest rates of infection in the country, below 1%. That dramatic drop in infections combined with an increasing number of vaccinated residents—over 70% of adults have had at least one dose—led Newsom to announce in April that most COVID-19 restrictions would be lifted June 15.

The reopening doesn't necessarily mean people will immediately flock to places and events they once packed or that businesses will opt to return to full capacity immediately. But a palpable feeling of anticipation has replaced the anxiety, frustration and sadness that ushered in summer 2020.



An open banner hangs outside the Tadich Grill, California's oldest restaurant, in San Francisco, on June 4, 2021. California, the first state in America to put in place a coronavirus lockdown, is now turning a page on the pandemic. Most of California's coronavirus restrictions will disappear Tuesday, June 15, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Eric Risberg

For Angie Barragan, who was born in Los Angeles and visited last week from Las Vegas, so many things that were once normal feel new, awkward and amazing: strolling in public without a mask, socializing for the first time in ages.

"It's kind of learning how to be a human again," she said as she shopped and strolled on LA's historic Olvera Street, a restored Mexican marketplace once clogged with tourists. "But it's great to be among



people."

The reopening doesn't mean the pandemic is over, Newsom has repeatedly stressed as an explanation for retaining his statewide emergency declaration.

Some public health measures will stay for "megaevents." People attending indoor concerts, sporting events or other large gatherings of more than 5,000 people will have to show proof that they are vaccinated or have a recent negative COVID-19 test. Those going to outdoor events with more than 10,000 people are "strongly encouraged" to do the same.

While fully vaccinated people will no longer be required to wear masks in most places, those who are unvaccinated are expected to, but it won't be enforced. Businesses have three choices: operate on an honor system, require customers to show proof of vaccination or require everyone to cover their face.



People arrive at Universal Studios in Universal City, Calif., Tuesday, June 15, 2021. On Tuesday, California lifted most of its COVID-19 restrictions and ushered in what has been billed as the state's "Grand Reopening." Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu

Many question if the honor system will work, including the California Nurses Association, which said the new rules essentially call on businesses and essential workers to be the vaccination police.

"This is not a sound public health strategy," said Sandy Rending, a president of the association, which is calling on people to keep masks on indoors and in crowds.

For now, masks are still required in places like public transit, airports,



health care settings and indoor school classes.

While applauding the reopening, some [business owners](#) said ever-shifting mask rules are confounding.

"We're excited—and a little confused," said Tom La Torre, owner of Sabella & La Torre Restaurant at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, a tourist haven that transformed into a ghost town during the pandemic.

Until now, his restaurant was limited to 50% capacity.



People take photos at Universal Studios in Universal City, Calif., Tuesday, June 15, 2021. On Tuesday, California lifted most of its COVID-19 restrictions and ushered in what has been billed as the state's "Grand Reopening." Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu



California Governor Gavin Newsom arrives to a news conference at Universal Studios in Universal City, Calif., on Tuesday, June 15, 2021. Starting Tuesday, there were no more state rules on social distancing, and no more limits on capacity at restaurants, bars, supermarkets, gyms, stadiums or anywhere else. Credit: AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu

"That will be nice to fill the place up. However, we are still confused about the mask mandate," La Torre said.

It's also unclear if people will come.

For Rita Torres, a retired university administrator in Oakland, the last 15

months were "mindboggling." She has missed dancing at live concerts and hugging her girlfriends at weekly happy hours. But for her, the reopening is just another day.

"Deep down, I want to rejoice," Torres said, but she's going to take it slow. "Because it's kind of like, is it too soon? Will we be sorry?"

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