

# California reopens, says goodbye to most COVID-19 rules

June 15 2021, by Jocelyn Gecker

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In this Saturday, May 29, 2021, file photo, people crowd the Santa Monica Pier in Santa Monica, Calif. 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/Damian Dovarganes, File

California, the first state in America to put in place a coronavirus lockdown, is now turning a page on the pandemic.

At the stroke of midnight, California is lifting most of its COVID-19 restrictions and ushering in what has been billed as the state's "Grand Reopening."

Starting Tuesday, there will be no more state rules on social distancing, and no more limits on capacity at restaurants, bars, supermarkets, gyms, stadiums or anywhere else. And masks—one of the most symbolic and fraught symbols of the pandemic—will no longer be mandated for vaccinated people in most settings, though businesses and counties can still require them.

Just in time for summer, California wants to send the message that life in the Golden State is getting much closer to normal. The economy is fully reopening for the first time in 15 months and people can largely return to pre-pandemic lifestyles. Fans can cheer mask-less at Dodgers and Giants games. Disneyland is throwing its doors open to all tourists after allowing just California residents. People can pack indoor bars and nightclubs from the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles to the Castro in San Francisco.



In this Friday, April 30, 2021, file photo, visitors walk down Main Street USA at Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif. 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/Jae Hong, File

"With all due respect, eat your heart out, the rest of the United States. There is no state in America that has more," Gov. Gavin Newsom said on the eve of the reopening. "The state is not just poised to recover, it's poised to come roaring back."

To mark the reopening, Newsom will make a few lucky residents millionaires. In a made-for-TV main event, the governor will draw 10 names of residents who have received at least one vaccine dose and

award each one \$1.5 million. The drawing is the grand finale to the nation's largest vaccine incentive, \$116 million in a COVID-19 vaccine lottery. Winners can collect the money once they're fully vaccinated.

Officials want tourists back, too.

"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.



In this May 17, 2021, file photo, some visitors wear face masks outdoors while taking pictures of the Hollywood sign at the Griffith Observatory in Los

Angeles. 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/Damian Dovarganes, File

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 shutdown in March 2020, California's businesses were just starting to reopen last June when cases started rising and the state was ordered to close 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 new records almost daily for infection rates and staggering death tolls. 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.



In this May 21, 2021, file photo, men lift weights in a fitness class at Lift Society in Studio City, Calif. 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/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File

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.

For Angie Barragan, who was born in Los Angeles and returned for a visit last week from her home in Las Vegas, so many once-normal things

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 the city'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.



In this May 4, 2021, file photo, customers chat at Scum and Villainy Cantina, a bar located on Hollywood Blvd, in Los Angeles. 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/Jae C. Hong, File

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

Fully vaccinated people will no longer be required to wear a mask, including indoors, in most places. Those who are unvaccinated are expected to wear masks, but that won't be enforced. Businesses have three choices: operate on an honor system; require customers to show proof of vaccination, or they can still require everyone to wear a mask.

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 residents to keep their masks on indoors and in crowds.





In this May 21, 2021, file photo, fans sit shoulder to shoulder in a vaccinated section of the stands during the fourth inning of a baseball game between the Los Angeles Dodgers and San Francisco Giants in San Francisco, 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/D. Ross Cameron, File



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



In this June 4, 2021, file photo, California Gov. Gavin Newsom holds up a lottery ball at the California Lottery Headquarters on Friday, June 4, 2021, in Sacramento, Calif., while drawing numbers for California's new vaccine incentive program. 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. (Paul Kitagaki Jr./The Sacramento Bee via AP, File)/The Sacramento Bee via AP)

For now, masks will still be required in places like public transit, airports, health care and indoor school classes.

Some business owners have complained that ever-shifting mask rules are confounding, while heartily applauding the reopening.

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

It's also unclear if people will come.

For Rita Torres, a retired university administrator in Oakland, the last 15 months were "mind boggling." She has missed dancing at live concerts and hugging her girlfriends at weekly happy hour outings. She's embraced having groceries delivered, a practice she once considered frivolous. Tuesday's reopening is, for her, just another day. She will venture out cautiously.

"Deep down I want to rejoice," she 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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