

# Official: California COVID surge could ease next month

January 7 2022, by Brian Melley

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Fans wear masks as they walk inside crypto.com Arena before an NHL hockey game between the Los Angeles Kings and the Nashville Predators Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022, in Los Angeles. Credit: AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez

The California surge in coronavirus cases has shut down schools and

sidelined thousands of police, firefighters, teachers and health care workers but officials are hoping it will be short-lived.

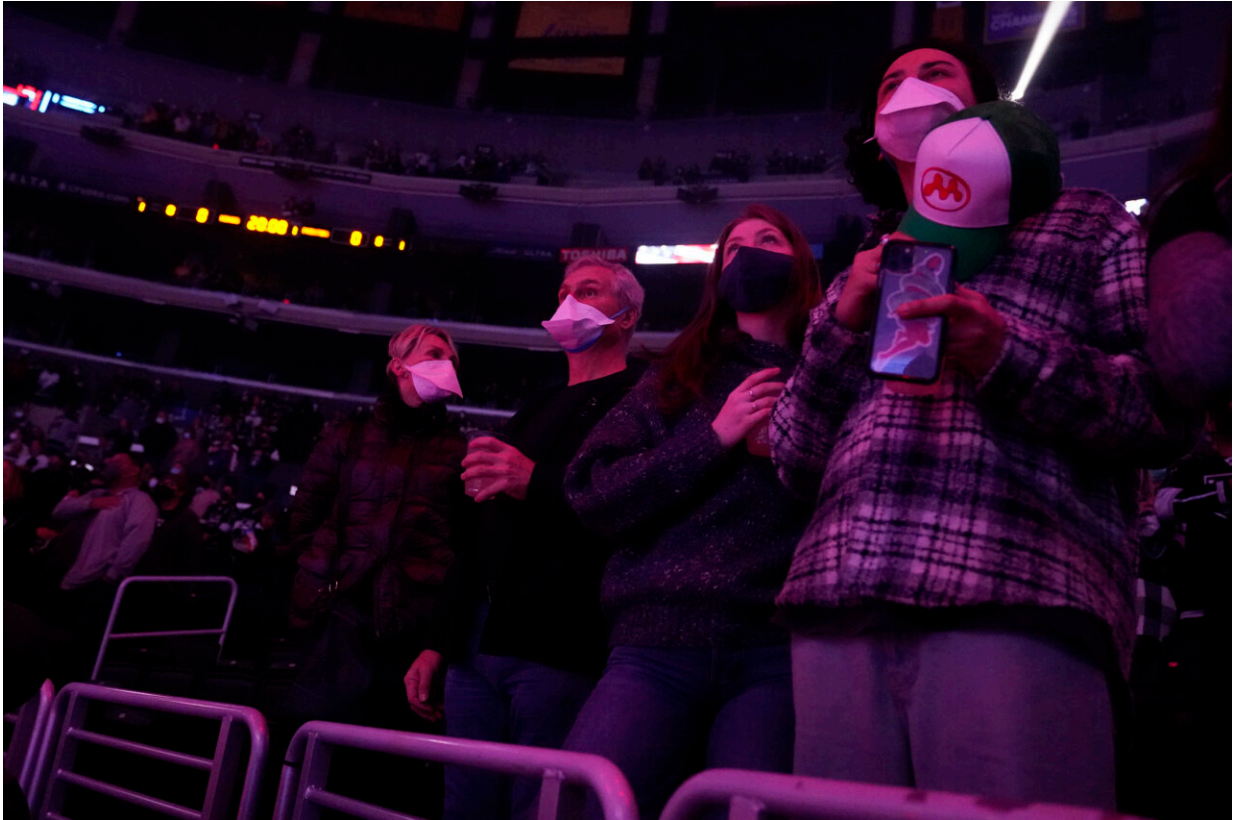
"My hope is that, you know, by the time we get to February, we're on the downside of seeing that massive amount of community transmission," Los Angeles County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said Thursday.

California's number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has soared five-fold in two weeks and hospitalizations have doubled. Los Angeles County, the state's largest with 10 million residents, reported more than 37,000 new cases on Thursday, which was the highest level since the pandemic started.

The jump is driven by the omicron variant, first detected in California in late November. Health officials say close contact during holiday gatherings, especially among unvaccinated people, has helped spread the highly infectious mutation.

But vaccinations and booster shots were protecting many people from severe illness, health officials said. Fewer than half of hospital patients with COVID-19 were there because of the infection. Most were hospitalized with unrelated illnesses, the county said.

"We do see this as a surge that will be, it is our hope and belief, short-lived," Los Angeles Police Chief Michel Moore said Thursday as the city announced that the virus had sidelined more than 800 police and fire personnel.



Fans wear masks inside crypto.com Arena before an NHL hockey game between the Los Angeles Kings and the Nashville Predators Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022, in Los Angeles. Credit: AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez

Moore said it was taking an average of three weeks for officers struck with COVID-19 to return to work.

San Francisco reported on Tuesday that 167 officers were quarantined and 135 firefighters—both representing about 8% of their forces—were absent due to COVID-19. San Diego had nearly 200 officers and other personnel out Tuesday, reflecting a similar percentage of the department.

The surge also has led to hourslong waits for COVID tests as parents

prepared to send their children back to school after the winter break. While millions of test kits have been distributed to counties, Gov. Gavin Newsom and state health officials have been criticized for backlogs.

Hundreds waited in line Thursday morning, some coughing and sneezing, at a test site in Long Beach.

"I think it's very much going out of control," said Salvador Barragan after self-administering his nasal swab. "I hope it calms down."



People wait in line for a COVID-19 test at Families Together of Orange County community health center in Tustin, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong

Not only are lab tests harder to get amid record demand, officials say they're taking longer to process because COVID-19 also has depleted the ranks of technicians.

One processing lab used by Santa Clara County has been sending samples to Texas due to staff shortages, Dr. Jennifer Tong, associate chief medical officer at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, told the Bay Area News [Group](#).

Off-the shelf home tests also are in short supply.

The virus surge has been straining school systems. District officials said all 54 schools in the West Contra Costa Unified School District, east of San Francisco, will be closed Friday and Monday.

More than 5,000 students have been absent each day this week, or almost a quarter of those enrolled in the district of 28,000 students and the district believes the coronavirus is to blame, spokesman Ryan Phillips said.



Nurse practitioner Brandon Vinzon collects a nasal swab sample from a boy for a COVID-19 test at Families Together of Orange County community health center in Tustin, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong

One in six of San Francisco's 3,600 teachers were out Thursday. Even with administrators, substitutes and others stepping in there weren't enough teachers for every classroom, Superintendent Vince Matthews.

"This is the most challenging time in my 36 years as an educator," Matthews said during a break from filling in as a sixth-grade science teacher. "We're trying to educate students in the middle of a pandemic while the sands around us are consistently shifting."

Nearly 900 teachers and aides in San Francisco called in sick Thursday.

A group of educators had called for a sickout, arguing that the school district hadn't done enough to protect them during the surge. They are asking for more testing and for all students to wear medical-grade masks.

It wasn't clear how many educators who called in sick took part or had the virus or were out caring for family members.



Medical assistant Leslie Powers carries swab samples collected from people to process them on-site at a COVID-19 testing site in Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



Reina Monterrosa holds the head of her 6-year-old son, Anderson, as nurse practitioner Rita Ray collects a nasal swab sample for a COVID-19 test at Families Together of Orange County community health center in Tustin, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong





Nurse practitioner Rita Ray collects a nasal swab sample from Sebastian Hernandez, 5, for a COVID-19 test at Families Together of Orange County community health center in Tustin, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



Healthcare workers Henry Paul, from left, Ray Akindele, Wilta Brutus process COVID-19 rapid antigen tests at a testing site in Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



A medical assistant calls up the next person in line at a COVID-19 testing site in Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



A man sits in a lawn chair while waiting to take a COVID-19 test as a long line of people is formed outside a testing site in Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



Healthcare workers Henry Paul, from left, Ray Akindele, Wilta Brutus and Leslie Powers process COVID1-9 rapid antigen tests at a testing site in Long Beach , Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



Healthcare workers Henry Paul, from left, Ray Akindele, Wilta Brutus and Leslie Powers process COVID-19 rapid antigen tests at a testing site in Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



Medical assistant Leslie Powers takes a swab sample from a woman at a COVID-19 testing site in Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



Medical assistant Leslie Powers, center, carries swab samples collected from people to process them on-site as people wait in line for a test at a COVID-19 testing site in Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong





People wait in line for a rapid antigen test at a COVID-19 testing site in Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



People wait in line for a COVID-19 test as medical assistant Leslie Powers, foreground, distributes test results at a testing site in Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



Medical assistant Henry Paul carries rapid antigen test samples collected from people to process them on-site at a COVID-19 testing site in Long Beach, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong

At Mission High School, student Jazmine Keel said more than 70 teachers joined the protest.

"There barely were even enough subs to take attendance," she told [KTVU-TV](#), although district officials said classes weren't interrupted.

A similar sickout was planned for Friday in the Oakland Unified School District. In an online post cited by the San Francisco [Chronicle](#), organizers said Oakland schools "are facing the greatest crisis in living memory."

"Staff and students sit in half-empty classrooms terrified that they will be the next to get infected and bring the disease home to their loved ones," the press release said.

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Citation: Official: California COVID surge could ease next month (2022, January 7) retrieved 12 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-california-covid-surge-ease-month.html>

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