

California Leads with Public Health and Vaccine Equity to Safely and Sustainably Reopen

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State introduces vaccine equity metric to update Blueprint for a Safer Economy based on vaccinating the state's hardest hit communities against COVID-19

California sets aside 40 percent of vaccine doses for most impacted communities; seeks to reach 2 million vaccine doses in those communities to move counties through tiers and open more activities safely

As vaccination increases and disease spread slows, counties will be able to move through tiers more quickly with modestly higher case rates

SACRAMENTO – The Newsom Administration today announced that California will lead with safety protocols and vaccine equity to end the pandemic and reopen the economy. To that end, the state has set aside 40 percent of vaccine doses for the hardest-hit communities and established a vaccine equity metric – which seeks to increase vaccinations in those communities – as a prelude to adjusting the Blueprint for a Safer Economy, which governs the conditions under which California's economy can safely operate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

California's approach will continue to focus on masking and effective use of testing, contact tracing, quarantine and isolation. Today the state is also updating its recommendations about the most effective use of masks and when to consider [double masking](#).

“With more vaccines online and administered, California is now in a position to take steps toward ending this pandemic by keeping our guard up and by vaccinating those Californians most at risk and most exposed,” said Governor Newsom. “Vaccinating our most impacted communities, across our state, is the right thing to do and the fastest way to end this pandemic.”

With three vaccines online and nearly 10 million doses administered statewide, vaccines have made a difference and overall disease trends have improved dramatically over the past six weeks. Case rates, test positivity, transmission rate, hospitalizations and ICU admissions are all on a steady decline since the winter surge.

This approach recognizes that the pandemic did not affect California communities equally. Forty percent of COVID cases and deaths have occurred in the lowest quartile of the Healthy Places Index (HPI), which provides overall scores and data that predict life expectancy and compares community conditions that shape health across the state. The rate of infections for households making less than \$40,000 per year (11.3) is more than double that of households with an income of \$120,000 or more (5.2). At the same time, California's wealthiest populations are being vaccinated at nearly twice the rate of our most vulnerable populations. The state is committed to doing better.

Consistent with the disproportionate impact of the virus, the state is modifying the Blueprint for a Safer Economy to lead with opening activities when vaccines have been deployed to the hardest-hit communities. This modification will shift Blueprint tier thresholds to allow slightly higher case rates per 100,000 population once more inoculations have occurred in the communities suffering the most, allowing counties to move to less restrictive tiers.

The initial goal of the vaccine equity metric is to deliver a minimum of 2 million doses to the hardest-hit quarter of the state as measured by the Healthy Places Index. The state has currently delivered 1.6 million doses to this quarter of the state. It is estimated that 2 million doses will be delivered in the vaccine equity quartile sometime in the next two weeks.

Once that threshold is reached, the Blueprint for a Safer Economy will be updated to allow for somewhat higher case rates in each tier, with an overall effect of allowing counties to loosen health restrictions at a somewhat accelerated, but still responsible, pace. The Blueprint will be updated again when 4 million doses have been administered in the vaccine equity quartile.

Using data to inform vaccine allocations, California will strategically increase the proportion of vaccines distributed to regions hardest hit by COVID-19 to help lower the rate of community infection, hospitalizations and deaths; reduce potential new variants that might emerge with each additional case; and, perhaps most importantly, ensure equitable distribution of the state's still limited vaccine supply.

The state will accomplish these goals by doubling the allocation for disproportionately-impacted communities (allotting 40 percent to them) as compared to the rest of the state; reserving appointments for members of communities severely impacted by the pandemic; and increasing funding for safety net providers to cover start up costs and for navigation assistance. More information about the state's efforts to end the pandemic through equitable vaccine administration is available via this [fact sheet](#).

“Increasing vaccinations in our hardest-hit communities is both morally right, and good for public health, because it will slow the spread of disease,” said Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency. “Even with these changes, California will retain some of the most robust public health protections in the nation.”

“By vaccinating more people, and those who are most vulnerable to COVID-19, science tells us that the disease should spread more slowly, giving variants fewer opportunities to take hold, and the health care system should be preserved,” continued Dr. Ghaly

“Businesses large and small across California have taken extraordinary steps to protect their employees and their customers,” said Dee Dee Myers, Senior Advisor to Governor Newsom and Director of the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz). “Their hard work, along with the efforts of Californians to abide by ongoing guidance, has allowed us to lower infection rates, facilitate equitable vaccine distribution and create an

accelerated path toward reopening.”

“Our goal is to get to the day when the Blueprint is no longer needed. As more people are vaccinated and more vaccines are available, especially in our most impacted communities, we can envision a day when California can enter the ‘green tier’ – in which strict public health measures will no longer be needed,” continued Governor Newsom.

“Until then, we will continue to evaluate, update and disclose public health and vaccine data to move at a steady and responsible pace.”

For more information, visit covid19.ca.gov.

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