

# As San Diego County coronavirus cases surge, schools and non-essential businesses remain open

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Across the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic has entered a deadly new period of resurgence as countless governments continue to ignore the crisis and relax restrictions or implement token measures. Schools, factories and other workplaces are being kept open despite the objective fact that the crisis has not been mitigated in the slightest and the global death toll approaches 1.28 million deaths. The capitalist ruling elites everywhere have prioritized profits over the lives of workers and their families.

San Diego County in southern California, home to the state's second largest city and its suburbs, is not exempt from this trend. On November 10, the county reported 401 positive COVID-19 cases, raising the region's total to more than 61,116 positive cases. The state of California has recorded more than 1 million cases and 18,120 lives lost to the deadly virus. San Diego County reported 30 lives lost to COVID-19 on Tuesday—accounting for one-half of all deaths in the state that day. No other county reported more than five deaths.

The county has reported almost 400 outbreaks over the course of the pandemic. Forty-seven outbreaks were reported during a single week at the beginning of October. It is no coincidence that a few weeks later, at the start of November, San Diego has seen a significant increase in cases. In the first week of November alone, 39 new outbreaks have been reported in the region.

San Diego's case rate increased to 7.4, then 8.9 over the past two weeks, where more than 7.0 cases per 100,000 people was the threshold for entering the "purple tier," according to a colored tier system implemented by the state of California. Counties enter into various color tiers depending on case rates and test positivity rates that open or tighten restrictions based on week-by-week case counts. Most counties in the state are in the "purple tier," meaning their businesses are subject to the highest restrictions.

Previously, the county had remained on the line between the "red tier" and the more restrictive "purple tier" as rates had remained at seven cases, or slightly below, per 100,000, barely keeping the county from further restrictions. As the county opened new massive testing programs and put efforts into

making certain their new sites ramped up testing rates, the testing positivity average decreased from 3.2 percent to 2.6 percent as the result of additional testing.

Even still, the data did not reflect the actual positivity rates. The additional testing programs have largely been implemented in the region's most affluent areas, serving the section of the population that is *least* likely to come into contact with COVID-19. It is the working class, essential workers and those who must risk constant, risky contact with the public, that has been forced to bear much of the exposure to coronavirus. They then face the most damage, economically due to lost wages and health expenditures, and are forced to suffer most due to reduced access to care and resources. It is no surprise then that COVID-19 is an illness which has predominantly hit the working class.

San Diego County officials have been lobbying the state government for weeks to ensure they skirt the restrictions despite the rising cases, but on Tuesday, San Diego was forcibly placed into the "purple tier" due to the recent spike in cases, joining most other counties in the state. The only reason San Diego was able to previously avoid the purple tier was due to a combination of obfuscation efforts combined with the state of California changing its COVID-19 guidelines.

As previously reported on the WSWs, instead of implementing comprehensive public health programs and putting a halt to non-essential business, San Diego has hidden outbreak location data and refused to share information with the public. Additionally, the county even attempted to pressure the state government to ignore an outbreak at San Diego State University that has now reached more than 1,300 students, which would drive up the county's case numbers.

San Diego has now joined Los Angeles County in the most restrictive category of COVID-19 rules. However, this means little for stopping the spread of the virus as Los Angeles has been consistently in the "purple tier" with no real efforts being given toward mitigation. While Los Angeles has released what are likely only partial and undercounted lists of outbreaks, San Diego continues to actively conceal which businesses and locations have outbreaks, cynically citing that transparency

would discourage accurate reporting.

By the end of this week, bars, restaurants, gyms and hair salons in San Diego County will need to halt regular indoor operations. After weeks of watching San Diego teeter on the red-purple line, many businesses, coupled with local officials, are threatening to simply continue with their present operations. In addition to providing no relief to businesses, the state has given businesses roughly four days to switch their protocols according to the new indoor operations and capacity rules, but many say they will simply ignore the rules. These efforts are buttressed by the San Diego City Council threatening to appeal the purple tier designation.

Despite the fact that the largest outbreaks have been at workplaces, including meatpacking and logistics companies, Democratic California Governor Gavin Newsom has blamed the new cases in California on individuals “letting their guard down,” ignoring the fact that the state’s arbitrary COVID-19 policies have led to a great amount of public confusion and fatigue.

Admitting to the haphazard way the tier system was designed, Newsom declared, “Anticipate that we’ll see some counties moving backward not forward. This is exactly why we designed the tier status the way that we did. It was about being more and less restrictive not based upon political whim, but based upon the data, based upon the epidemiology and based upon the facts on the ground.”

An effective effort to crush the pandemic would require accessible and thorough public COVID-19 data, cash assistance to families, workers, and small businesses, a comprehensive shut-down of non-essential businesses, the implementation of effective protective measures for essential workers and extensive, widely accessible, free COVID-19 testing.

California’s tier system is clearly designed to only result in the implementation of temporary, superficial measures, while keeping businesses and schools open. There has been no real effort by any section of the government and ruling class to mitigate the spread.

Notably, schools that have already reopened will not be subject to purple tier restrictions and will be allowed to continue their reopening plans, some of which will allow all students into in-person classes simultaneously for regular operations this month.

The regulations given to “purple” counties declare that all K-12 schools that are presently online cannot offer in-person instruction while the county remains purple. However, if a school currently offers in-person instruction, even if it is for a small group, the school is not only allowed to maintain in-person classes, but is granted the ability to *expand* operations, meaning school districts across San Diego County will be continuing with their plans to allow all students onto campus simultaneously, and resume close to normal operations, just as they had planned when the region’s cases were not surging. It is beyond a doubt that this policy will result in more outbreaks

at schools, among students and educators, as residents watch in horror as COVID-19 continues to spread throughout the community.

A parent with children in the district whose school will remain open despite the new tier status told the WSWS, “It is not at all reassuring that schools are remaining open in a situation in which schools would not be allowed to open if they hadn’t already been authorized when things were less dire. COVID seems to be getting worse, not better, nationwide, and San Diego County is reporting widespread risk. It is a scary situation.”

San Diego Unified School District, the second largest district in California, unveiled plans this week to test staff and students for COVID-19. The district’s roughly 100,000 students and 10,000 staff would take a PCR test bimonthly, at the cost of about \$80 per person per month. Students will also be required to submit an arbitrary health screening each day. This inadequate plan, however, will not be mandatory, and its purpose is only to offer the illusion of protection, and will not prevent the virus from ripping through an entire school in a few days’ time, regardless of the bimonthly testing.

School board members have blatantly admitted that there is never going to be a situation where there are no cases, exposing the way in which illness, death, and long term health problems associated with the virus are the “cost of doing business” and are being openly accepted as part of a bipartisan “herd immunity” policy by the financial elite, including the Democrats who run the state.

The response in California must be taken as a warning to how the Democratic Party and a future Biden administration will approach the pandemic at the national level. Workers and students have entered into a fight for their lives and livelihoods. It is clear that their fight must be waged independently of the Democrats and against both big business parties.

Workers must take the fight for their safety during this unprecedented pandemic and economic catastrophe into their own hands by building workplace and community rank-and-file safety committees. Educators, parents and students in San Diego are urged to join the San Diego Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee which is fighting against the dangerous reopening of schools in the region.



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