Despite horrific numbers, California governor ends stay-at-home order, mirroring President Biden's pandemic policies

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On Monday, California Governor Gavin Newsom announced the lifting of stay-at-home orders for the entire state. The stay-at-home orders had been dependent on ICU availability percentages across counties grouped in five broad regions, 1: Northern California (41.2 percent), 2: Greater Sacramento (11.9 percent), 3: Bay Area (23.4 percent), 4: San Joaquin Valley (1.3 percent) and 5: Southern California (0 percent). Up until this Monday, regions 3, 4 and 5 were under restrictive stay-at-home orders. Regions 1 and 2 were under a less restrictive tier system (purple: widespread, red: substantial, yellow: moderate).

The new order reimposes a tier-based system (purple, red, orange, and white) that enforces restrictions based on COVID-19 positivity and case rates in each county. Except for three small northern California counties in the red and yellow tiers, the entire state is now in the purple tier.

The plan will allow the reopening of outside dining in restaurants, as well as gyms and outdoor sports by this Friday.

The situation in California remains dire with the seven-day average for COVID-19 deaths continuing to rise even as new infections have started to trend downward. On Tuesday, Worldometer recorded 22,058 new coronavirus infections in one day, reaching a total of 3,221,953 cases. There were 728 new deaths, 38,255 in total. Hospitals reported admitting 562 new patients, for a total of 19,293. The availability of intensive care units in Southern California and the Central Valley (the southern two thirds of the state) is still at 0 percent. In a four-color standard, most of the state is in the purple tier (widespread infections).

At 114 new cases per 10,000 inhabitants, California exceeds the US average (80 per 100,000) and is third to Arizona and South Carolina (138 and 115 respectively). California's average death toll for last week, 534, is four times the 107 seven-day average reported on December 5.

Such a grim toll is a direct consequence of policies implemented at the state and local level by California's Democratic Party, which dominates the Golden State's politics. The state's policies differed only cosmetically from those of former President Donald Trump and are perfectly in line with those of President Joe Biden. The results are quite clear as the richest state of the richest country in the world has emerged as a global epicenter.

Despite the abundance of wealth in the state, no serious social resources have been allocated for the protection of human life: on the contrary, while the health care system has collapsed in crisis and supplies like personal protective equipment and oxygen have been utterly inadequate, the state's billionaires have in many cases doubled their obscene wealth since the beginning of the pandemic.

Newsom insisted in his announcement that the reopening was based on science. "We're seeing a flattening of the curve," declared Newsom at the Monday press conference, though he acknowledged that the state is "not out of the woods."

According to the California Department of Public Health, the regional stay-at-home order ended because ICU projections through California have improved, even though regions 4 and 5, including the Los Angeles County megalopolis, have virtually no ICU beds available.

Los Angeles County's restaurants may resume outdoor dining and hair salons may reopen under

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Newsom's orders, among other loosened restrictions.

The lifting of the ban was decided by Newsom and a handful of advisers, and in consultation with the restaurant industry, on a "need to know basis." Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti declared that he had only been informed "with everybody else" when the decision was made public on Monday.

Los Angeles County is planning to issue a new health order Friday, which will allow the county to reopen outdoor dining and rescind a 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew, according to Los Angeles County Public Health Department director Barbara Ferrer.

Los Angeles had imposed an outdoor dining ban in November following an explosion of COVID-19 cases. For seven weeks, restaurants operated on take-out dining only. Retail stores and malls were able to stay open but had to operate at 20 percent capacity; that rule was not enforced.

Newsom declared on Monday that the Southern California region is projected to reach 33.3 percent ICU capacity by February 21. While he offered no evidence for his claim, there has been a decline in new cases, in large part because of the stay-at-home measures, closure of playgrounds, the curfews and the prohibitions of large gatherings. Case have fallen despite the fact that a number of law enforcement agencies in regions 4 and 5 refused to enforce such bans.

Newsom, the target of a recall effort driven by fake grass-roots organizations with the support of QAnon, the Proud Boys, the Freedom Angels, The Three Percenters, The Church of Glad Tidings and other right-wing, evangelical and anti-vaccine groups, is also pushing forward with the reopening of public schools.

On December 30, Newsom proposed $2 billion dollars of school funds be diverted to classroom alterations, testing and other measures to reopen schools, a measure cynically dubbed "Safe Schools For All." State officials expect school districts to submit reopening plans by February 1.

He denies that any of this had anything to do with the recall campaign. As of this weekend, nearly half-a-million valid signatures had been turned in, out of the 1.5 million needed by the March 17 deadline, for the recall to take effect.

On Monday, Newsom also announced changes in California's COVID-19 vaccination priorities, moving toward an age-based plan and away from prioritizing essential workers, further placing teachers, health, restaurant and other frontline workers in peril. As throughout the rest of the US, vaccine distribution in California has been halting and chaotic. Only 2.6 million doses have been administered out of a population of 39 million.

All of Newsom's initiatives are in line with those now being pushed by President Biden, the Democratic Party and the financial oligarchy, imposing the same murderous logic of herd immunity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic associated with former President Trump and the global ruling elites. Without the intervention of the working class to keep schools closed, shut down non-essential production and guarantee full income, what can be expected in the coming weeks is another wave of deaths and illness. The beneficiary, once again, will be the financial oligarchy that demands uninterrupted production in order to guarantee ever rising profits.

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