

COVID-19 cases rise by 165 percent in California since lifting of restrictions in June

Brian Gene
22 July 2021

The highly contagious Delta variant continues to drive a surge in COVID-19 infections across the United States. While poorer and less vaccinated states in the South have been particularly hard hit, California, run by the Democratic Party and hailed for its relatively high vaccination rates compared to the rest of the country, has seen the daily average of new cases jump by 165 percent since reopening on June 15, according to California's official pandemic data tracking site, covid19.ca.gov. Between July 10-16, 23,027 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in the state, reflecting a 90 percent increase in new cases from the week prior.

The wealthiest state in the country, home to 165 billionaires, California reports only a 63 percent vaccination rate for those 18 and older, leaving millions at risk, but this has not stopped the relaxation of all restrictions on occupancy and an end to the largely toothless statewide mask mandate. Under these conditions, it was clear that the highly contagious Delta variant would grip the state shortly after reopening. Los Angeles County, California's most populous region with over 10 million residents, has seen daily cases skyrocket by over 500 percent since June 15 when all restrictions were relaxed, according to data from the County Public Health department. While death rates have so far remained stable—an indicator which lags behind infections—hospitalization rates have doubled and continue to rise.

In response to this sobering data, Dr. Muntu Davis of the County Health Department announced a public health order mandating masks for all residents indoors, regardless of vaccination status, that took effect Saturday. On Friday, however, Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva stated that the mandate will not be enforced as it is “not backed by science” and contradicts the guidelines of the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC), which recommends only that the unvaccinated wear masks.

Eric, a health care worker who managed intubated patients during the first and second waves of the pandemic, told the *World Socialist Web Site* he is deeply concerned about the rising cases in California and across the country, “What made me feel the worst was, during the first wave, those of us in health care watched people congregate and say that COVID-19 was all a hoax. And the whole time we were wrapping bodies. And later, when the cases started to drop, people started congregating again, saying it wasn't as bad as they thought or it was all made up to make the president look bad. And we were still wrapping bodies. It made me feel used and spit on. Like everything we went through wasn't real.

“Now with the vaccine, people are talking about personal responsibility and the ‘pioneer spirit.’ But they do not really know what that means. They are talking about personal freedom. Like it is an issue of freedom. Like it is up to you if you get sick and it is no one else's business. But it is everyone's business. A disease is not a choice.”

In Northern California's two-million-resident-dense Alameda County, which encompasses the cities of Oakland and Berkeley, a similar story is unfolding, with cases increasing 583 percent since restrictions were dropped, according to county health department data. Hospitalizations have more than doubled from 41 to 105 patients and show an upward trend, along with test positivity rates, which have spiked from less than 1 percent to 4.5 percent in that time. Alameda joined seven Bay Area counties on Friday announcing a toothless “recommendation” for masking indoors.

In San Diego County, along the US-Mexico border, the health department reports a 200 percent increase in

daily cases and a doubling of hospitalizations since statewide reopening. Health officials reported on Wednesday that COVID-19 cases have increased 82 percent just in the past week alone, with 3,465 cases reported in the past seven days. Daily cases are now at 273 per day as opposed to 68 average cases at the time of reopening in mid June, and a doubling of hospitalizations with 77 COVID-19 patients admitted within the last week alone. Despite the surge in the county of over 3 million residents, there has as of yet been no mention of a need for increased restrictions. San Diego schools are requiring all students to return to full time, in person learning in the fall, despite reporting a steady increase in on-campus cases during summer school months.

As cases skyrocket, health care workers can expect a tsunami of hospitalizations on the horizon. Workers remember how last year they had to reuse personal protective equipment, choose who would receive lifesaving resources, watch families witnessing their intubated loved ones' deaths by remote camera, and store bodies in refrigeration trucks as morgues overflowed. Restrictions on more profitable elective surgeries as beds fill up will drive down hospital profits and lead to layoffs and cuts to worker benefits while simultaneously demanding longer hours.

California Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom has refused to enforce statewide restrictions and continues to pursue economic reopening in the face of the rising tide of COVID-19 cases. The state's original mitigation plan, a confusing matrix of color-coded tiers called "The Blueprint for a Safer Economy," has been retired as of June 15.

The stated purpose of the Blueprint was to minimize the economic impact of COVID-19 and "[reduce] stress on the hospital system" through an adjustable series of countermeasures. Yet despite the state reporting a doubling of hospitalizations and an accelerating reduction in available ICU beds, there is no intention of reviving any mitigation efforts. Though the tiers have been thrown out the window, it is important to note that the current test positivity rates would currently place Los Angeles and Alameda County in the most restrictive Purple tier, and San Diego in the next restrictive Red tier of this system, requiring retail occupancy restrictions, a ban on indoor restaurant dining, and potentially school closings.

Newsom faces a recall election in September, the result of pressure from right-wing forces who have fought against all lockdown measures and incorrectly associate Newsom with these restrictions. In reality the majority of workplaces have been open since spring of 2020, and despite mask, "social-distancing" and gathering mandates, schools were allowed open and workplaces continued to function as sources of major outbreaks, producing the nightmarish conditions in hospitals in December 2020 that bled into the New Year as infections surged to an all time high.

The opening of the floodgates for infection in the richest state of the richest country cannot be attributed to anything except the criminality of a ruling elite, which has no interests in carrying out public health policies that are capable to halting the virus and saving lives, but instead shoring up corporate profits. A serious effort to bring the pandemic to an end and save lives includes the stopping of all non-essential business, substantial economic relief for workers and small businesses to allow the population to shelter in place, the mass production and distribution of vaccines and the pumping of tens of millions of dollars into educational campaigns and outreach to overcome vaccine hesitancy that exists primarily throughout the poorest sections of the population.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact