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San Bernardino County reports almost triple the coronavirus deaths in February than any other month

Knowing the real number of deaths in February will take weeks or months

By **NIKIE JOHNSON** | nijohnson@scng.com and **BEAU YARBROUGH** | byarbrough@scng.com |

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San Bernardino County reported almost triple the [coronavirus](#) deaths in February as in any previous month of the pandemic: 1,035, up from 394 in January and 316 in December.

But, only 57 of those 1,035 people actually died in February, [county data shows](#). The vast majority of the deaths reported in February are of people who died in December or January. County officials [acknowledged in January](#) that it was taking six to eight weeks for some deaths to show up in the statistics. So, although cases and hospitalizations clearly show that the winter surge is subsiding, it could be months before February's true death toll becomes clear.

The county reported 12,178 new cases in February, down from more than 80,000 cases in January and 100,000 cases in December. February's total was also lower than July or August during the summer surge.

Testing was also down, though not as sharply as cases — about 266,000 test results were reported in February, down from about 550,000 each in December and January.

San Bernardino County will find out Tuesday whether its case rate has dropped enough for it to move from the purple tier to the less-restrictive red tier in [the state's reopening plan](#). The percentage of tests coming back positive was already [low enough last week](#), but the case rate — which, adjusted for testing volume, was 15.2 new cases per day per 100,000 people — would have to drop to 7.0 or below for two consecutive weeks before more businesses would be permitted to reopen.

There were 285 people with confirmed COVID-19 cases in San Bernardino County hospitals, including 75 in ICUs, as of Feb. 28. That's a fraction of the 1,017 people hospitalized and 258 people in ICUs on the first of the month.

Here are the latest numbers, according to county and state public health officials.

San Bernardino County

Confirmed cases: 286,755 total, up 678 from Friday, averaging 270 reported per day in the past week

Deaths: 2,940 total, up 157 from Friday, averaging 43.3 reported per day in the past week

Hospital survey: 285 confirmed and 23 suspected patients hospitalized Sunday, including 75 confirmed and 5 suspected patients in the ICU, with 25 of 25 facilities reporting. The number of confirmed patients is down 34.8% from a week earlier.

Tests: 2,492,167 total, up 30,663 from Friday, averaging 8,977 reported per day in the past week

Resolved cases (estimate): 281,546 total, up 1,311 from Friday, averaging 293 per day in the past week

Vaccinations: The county and other providers have administered 287,352 vaccine doses to at least 202,431 people as of Monday.

Reopening plan tier: Purple (widespread risk level; many nonessential indoor business operations are closed) based on these metrics as of Tuesday, Feb. 23:



- New cases per day per 100,000 residents: 15.2
- Case rate adjusted for testing volume: 15.2
- Test positivity rate: 6.1% (7.1% in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods)
- What's next: To advance to the red tier and reopen more businesses, San Bernardino County would need an adjusted case rate of 7.0 or below and both positivity rates below 8.0% for two consecutive weeks.

To see a map and list of cases, deaths and per-capita rates by community, click [here](#).

Here is a look at how the county's numbers have changed each day:

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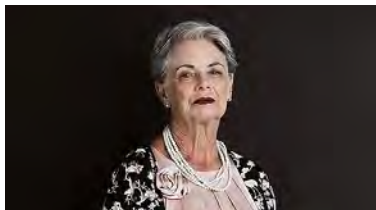


Nikie Johnson | Data Reporter

Nikie Johnson has been a journalist in Southern California since 2005 when she started at The Press-Enterprise, now part of the Southern California News Group. A Midwestern native, she graduated from the University of Houston with a degree in communications and previously worked at the Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville. She has been a copy editor, metro editor, digital editor and breaking news editor, and now uses data and public records to tell stories on the crime and public safety beat. She has trained with the Poynter Institute, Investigative Reporters & Editors and USC's Center for Health Journalism, and has won several awards for breaking news coverage and reporting on housing permits.

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Beau Yarbrough | Reporter

Beau Yarbrough wrote his first newspaper article taking on an authority figure (his middle school principal) when he was in 7th grade. He's been a professional journalist since 1992, working in Virginia, Egypt and California. In that time, he's covered community news, features, politics, local government, education, the comic book industry and more. He's covered the war in Bosnia, interviewed presidential candidates, written theatrical reviews, attended a seance, ridden in a blimp and interviewed both Batman and Wonder Woman (Adam West and Lynda Carter). He also cooks a mean pot of chili.

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With reopenings in gear, Newsom warns virus cases could shift from drop-off to 'plateau'



Diego Almendor has his temperature read by Los Toros Mexican restaurant owner Nicolas Montano before he begins his shift in February. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

By LUKE MONEY, RONG-GONG LIN II

MARCH 1, 2021 2:08 PM PT



The darkest days of California’s winter coronavirus surge are shrinking in the rearview mirror, prompting new optimism — as well as continued pleas for vigilance — as the state moves forward with a [wider reopening](#) of businesses, as well as schools for in-person learning.

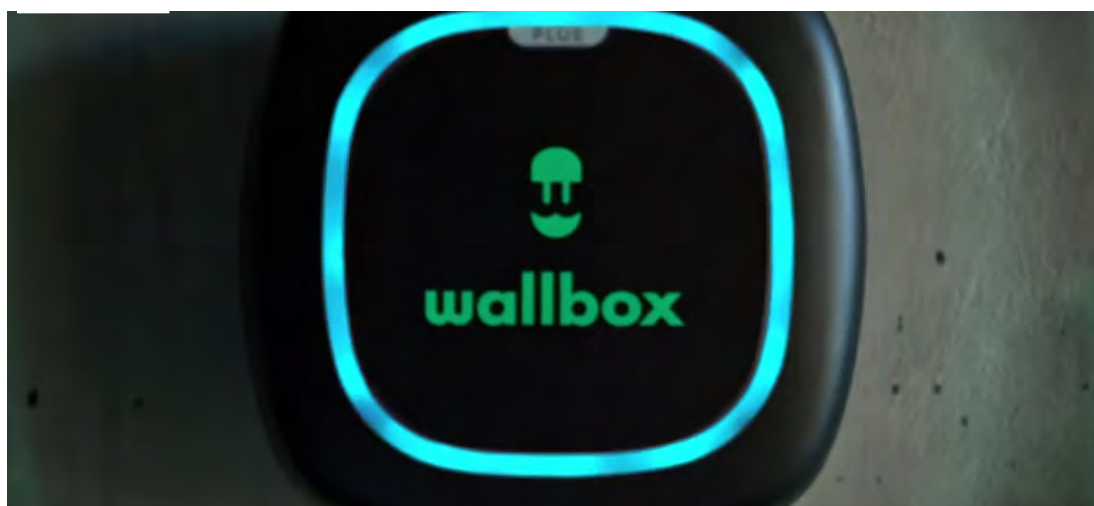
Although the state’s coronavirus numbers have plummeted to levels not seen in months, Gov. Gavin Newsom on Monday acknowledged that “we are seeing a little bit of a plateau, and one needs to be mindful of that.”

His remarks echo sentiments recently shared by federal health officials, who warn that, despite the recent progress, it would be premature to declare victory over the pandemic.

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Monday that she remained “deeply concerned about a potential shift in the trajectory of the pandemic” as the latest data suggested that newly reported cases were stalling nationwide.

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“I am really worried about reports that more states are rolling back the exact public health measures we have recommended to protect people from COVID-19,” she said during a briefing.

The rate of decline may have slowed, but recent weeks have put California — and the nation as a whole — on a more positive trajectory.

Over the last week, California has reported an average of [5,300 new coronavirus cases](#) per day, down almost 46% from two weeks ago.

As of Sunday, 4,912 coronavirus-positive patients were hospitalized statewide, the lowest figure since Nov. 19. The number of Californians battling COVID-19 in intensive

care units — 1,439 — has also fallen to pre-Thanksgiving levels.



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March 1, 2021

Given the current metrics, Newsom said the state was positioned to move forward and that he was “very encouraged by the stabilization.”

The governor said state officials would likely announce Tuesday that seven counties would move from the purple tier — the strictest of the state’s four-category [reopening roadmap](#) — into the more permissive red tier. The counties slated to advance are Santa Clara, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, El Dorado, Napa, Lassen and Modoc.

If those seven join the red tier later this week, that would raise the number of Californians who live in counties that are outside the most restrictive tier from about 1.6 million to 5 million, representing about 13% of the state’s population.

Newsom said more counties were expected to enter the red tier next week.

“I’m very encouraged by the stabilization — the case rates, the positivity rate,” he said. “We do anticipate a majority of Californians in the next few weeks to be residing in counties that have moved out of the most restrictive purple tier.”

That optimism is also reflected in an agreement Newsom and Democratic legislative leaders announced Monday to give [school districts \\$2 billion to open](#), by April 1, campuses serving students in transitional kindergarten through second grade.

“We’re not waiting to get out of this purple tier in order to get our kids safely back into in-person instruction,” Newsom said during a news conference. “And that’s what’s so meaningful to me — that we’re not slowing down; we’re now accelerating the pace of reopening.”

Perhaps the rosier development of all is that the number of people vaccinated against COVID-19 continues to grow. As of Monday, almost [9.1 million vaccine doses](#) had been administered statewide, according to the California Department of Public Health.

But challenges remain. Echoing Walensky’s concerns, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation’s leading expert on infectious diseases, said Sunday that recent national data suggested the drop in new daily [coronavirus cases had stalled](#), and cases were starting to increase slightly, hovering around 70,000 a day.



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March 1, 2021

Both he and Walensky warned against states moving too aggressively to loosen coronavirus restrictions and reopen their economies.

That’s especially true, Walensky said, given the continued proliferation of more-infectious coronavirus variants.

“At this level of cases, with variants spreading, we stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground we have gained,” she said. “These variants are a very real threat to our

people and our progress. Now is not the time to relax the critical safeguards that we know can stop the spread of COVID-19 in our communities, not when we are so close.”

“With more data coming out on “variants such as we have in California and such as we have in New York, it is really risky to say, ‘It’s over; we’re on the way out,’ ” Fauci said Sunday on CNN’s [“State of the Union.”](#)

He noted that in past periods of the pandemic, such as during the summer, states moved too quickly to reopen the economy: “When we started to pull back prematurely, we saw the rebound. We definitely don’t want that to happen.”

Fauci said the coming week would help reveal where the nation was headed. If cases continue to rise, “then we’re going to go right back to the road of rebounding,” Fauci said on CNN.

On NBC’s [“Meet the Press,”](#) Fauci said the nation needed its average number of new daily coronavirus cases to drop much lower than the current figure, “particularly in light of the fact that we have some [worrisome variants](#) that are in places like California and New York and others that we’re keeping our eye on. So it’s really too premature right now to be pulling back too much” from restrictions.

Andy Slavitt, senior advisor to the White House COVID-19 Response Team, said in a recent news briefing, “We couldn’t say it in stronger terms: We think it is a mistake to take our foot off the gas too early, especially when we are accelerating our vaccination efforts right now.”

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CVS, Walgreens challenge Newsom's comments about unused doses in California



Gov. Gavin Newsom watches as ICU nurse Helen Cordova receives the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at Kaiser Permanente Los Angeles Medical Center on Dec. 14 in Los Angeles. (Getty Images)

By MELODY GUTIERREZ | STAFF WRITER

MARCH 2, 2021 5 AM PT



SACRAMENTO — Gov. Gavin Newsom stood in front of local government leaders and lawmakers in Fresno on Friday and told Californians the state had taken swift action to reallocate thousands of COVID-19 vaccine doses from a provider who “was not administering the vaccines quickly enough.”

“And yes, forgive me, we decided to send them to the Valley because you deserve them,” Newsom added.

It wasn’t the first time Newsom had publicly said the state was asserting its authority to ensure life-saving doses were not languishing on drug store shelves, going unused. Last month, Newsom said the state reallocated 200,000 vaccine doses because a large pharmacy chain was “sitting on those doses.”

But in those two instances, the companies in question are objecting to Newsom’s comments, saying it was their own efforts that flagged the unused doses for the state.

A California Department of Public Health representative identified Walgreens and CVS Health pharmacies as the companies in the two examples referenced by Newsom last month. Both received doses in the federal pharmacy partnership for vaccinating long-term care patients and facility staff, in which doses were allotted based on the number of beds in a facility and an estimate of total staff working there. The companies say they ended up with thousands of extra doses due to the federal formula for allocating vaccine for that program and because fewer than expected staff opted to be inoculated.

Because of that, representatives for Walgreens and CVS said Newsom’s characterization that the state stepped in and removed its doses due to poor performance is simply not true.

Walgreens spokeswoman Jessica Masuga said that the pharmacy chain “determined that we would not need the 34,000 doses for the long-term care facility clinics and so they were reallocated by the state.”

“Criticism that CVS Health is sitting on doses or not administering them fast enough is inaccurate and misinformed,” CVS spokeswoman Monica Prinzing said.

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By Pfizer

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Newsom had indirectly criticized CVS Health during a news conference Feb. 8, saying the state reallocated 200,000 doses in the possession of one of the state’s largest pharmacy chains.

“We were able to quickly and efficiently and effectively move those doses out because, frankly, they were sitting on those doses,” Newsom said of CVS.

State public health officials said the CVS incident Newsom referenced involved closer to 180,000 doses. Prinzing said it was CVS that “proactively reached out to the state to repurpose 180,000 doses.” She added that in most cases, excess doses were never in the pharmacy’s possession.

“Following that outreach, Governor Gavin Newsom’s decision to transfer vaccine from the long-term care pharmacy partnership to other vaccine providers in the state helps ensure these valuable doses will be put to the best use — which is exactly what we hoped for as the ideal next step,” she said.

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The governor’s office declined to answer questions about the accuracy of Newsom’s comments, instead providing a general statement from the California Department of Public Health.

“The Governor has been very clear that it’s not acceptable for vaccines to be sitting in freezers when they can be providing life-saving protection for our seniors, teachers, health care workers and others,” the statement read. “While the vast majority of providers are working hard to administer vaccines as quickly as possible, when doses are sitting unused, the state has reclaimed and reallocated those vaccines so they can administered promptly.”

The Times requested details on when the state has reallocated unused doses, but that information has not yet been released.

Newsom has faced criticism for the state’s slow vaccine rollout and for data that suggested much of California’s supply appeared to be sitting on shelves in January. County health officers have blamed [state reporting issues](#), saying inaccurate and delayed data showed more unused vaccine in providers’ hands than actually existed.

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The governor said the state has been scrutinizing every provider and system to make sure all vaccine is being used, a process that is ongoing.

As of Monday, the state has administered more than 9 million first and second doses of vaccine. California is in the process of handing over administration of its [vaccine program to Blue Shield of California](#) in a move Newsom said will provide “transparency, more accountability.”

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Riverside County announces coronavirus vaccine clinic changes

More sites will open, another will move and one will turn into a full-time testing site

By **BEAU YARBROUGH** | byarbrough@scng.com | The Press-Enterprise

PUBLISHED: March 1, 2021 at 4:53 p.m. | UPDATED: March 1, 2021 at 4:53 p.m.

Riverside County is opening more [vaccination](#) sites, expanding hours on others, moving a location and turning one into a testing center.

The changes, announced Monday, March 1, are:

- The Perris fairgrounds two-days-a-week vaccination site will be converted to a seven-days-a-week [coronavirus](#) testing site, starting Tuesday, March 2.
- Three new sites will open Wednesday, March 3, and be run by OptumServe. They are at 1377 Hamner Ave., Norco; 39716 Winchester Road, Temecula; and 11711 West Drive, Desert Hot Springs.
- The Diamond stadium in Lake Elsinore vaccination site will shift from two days a week to operations Thursday through Monday. It will be run by Curative.
- The Corona High School vaccination site will close Friday, March 5. Its staff will move to a new vaccination clinic site in Moreno Valley, the location of which will be announced soon. Those who got their first shot at Corona High will be contacted about when and where to receive the second dose.
- The Indio fairgrounds vaccination site will no longer be operated by Riverside County but by Curative.

“The changes that are planned will help provide vaccines in locations where they are needed and give greater access to residents in those communities,” Kim Saruwatari, director of Riverside County Public Health, is quoted as saying in a news release.

To make an appointment at a county-run clinic or those operated by Curative or OptumServe in Riverside County, visit [RivCoPH.org/covid-19-vaccine](https://rivcoph.org/covid-19-vaccine).

Appointments for the new clinics will be posted as soon as they are available.

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Beau Yarbrough | Reporter



Can't Get a Covid Vaccine? In This County, Everybody is Eligible

The rural area outside Phoenix is one of the first places in the U.S. to open vaccinations up to the general public. This is what success looks like.

By Simon Romero

March 1, 2021 Updated 4:49 p.m. ET

GLOBE, Ariz. — In most parts of the country, getting a coronavirus vaccine can feel like trying to win the lottery, scouring the internet for appointments under complex eligibility standards that vary from state to state, and even county to county.

In Kentucky and Indiana, anyone over 60 can get vaccinated but you have to be 65 or 70 most everywhere else. About 18 states are offering shots to grocery workers, and 32 are vaccinating teachers. Cancer or heart problems? It depends on where you live.

Then there is Gila County, Ariz., where any resident over the age of 18 can walk into a clinic without an appointment right now and get a vaccine.

“The whole process is incredibly easy,” said Frank Struck, 24, an electrician and maintenance worker who got inoculated at a hospital in Globe, a town in the county, which stretches across the desert and pine forests about 90 miles east and northeast of Phoenix. “No bureaucracy, no crazy lines — you just go in, get the shot and come out with peace of mind.”

With a limited supply of vaccine to offer to the millions of Americans clamoring for it, the country has faced a choice from the beginning: Deliver shots as swiftly as possible by allowing anyone who wanted one to get one, or target scarce supplies to the most vulnerable first.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended the latter course, and as a result, state officials have agonized over who is entitled and who is not — in some cases, slowing deliveries to make sure the neediest went first.

Gila County started off with a set of qualifying standards as well. But it has been so successful at vaccinating its residents that it is now one of the first places in the United States to open eligibility to the general population, offering a glimpse of what vaccination could start to look like in the rest of the country weeks or months from now.



A couple left the Cobre Valley Regional Medical Center in Globe after being vaccinated. Juan Arredondo for The New York Times

“I guess you can penalize us for giving out too many vaccines,” said Neil Jensen, the chief executive of the Cobre Valley Regional Medical Center, a hospital system that hired more than 20 people in recent weeks to expand its vaccination effort. “We just don’t think that’s going to happen.”

During a pandemic that has claimed the lives of at least 209 county residents, many people in the county of 54,000 people are welcoming the broader availability of the vaccines, a boon that follows a harrowing surge in hospitalizations around the start of the year. The expanded vaccination campaign has coincided over the past two weeks with a 52 percent plunge in new cases.

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“I’m so thankful to be in this position right now,” said Gina Paul, 53, a retired municipal clerk who was getting her second dose on Friday at the hospital in Globe, the county seat of 7,500 people, which was founded in the 1870s as a mining camp.

Ms. Paul said she got her first dose a few weeks ago, after taking her mother-in-law to get vaccinated and telling hospital staff members that she was open to it as well if they had any leftovers at the end of a day. They called Ms. Paul back, and she promptly got a shot. Now she is trying to persuade her 19-year-old son to get one.

Health officials and elected leaders warn that big challenges persist in Gila County, in part because, in a county where anybody can get the vaccine, not everybody wants it. There has been skepticism about the vaccine, as well as resistance to mask-wearing and social distancing measures, among some people in the deeply conservative county, where President Biden lost by 34 percentage points even while winning Arizona as a whole in the November 2020 election.



Unlike some rural counties, Gila County has hospitals in Globe, the county seat, and in its other main town where residents can be vaccinated. Juan Arredondo for The New York Times

For the moment, many residents seem to be in a wait-and-see mode. Bars and restaurants have been open for indoor business during most of the pandemic, with only a few limits, though some aspects of daily life in the county, like high school sports, have had cancellations or delays.

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Resistance to mitigation measures has endured as case numbers have plunged in recent weeks. At the Safeway grocery store in the town of Payson one afternoon last week, about a quarter of the customers did not wear masks, including some men who were openly carrying firearms while shopping for food.

The risk that the virus could surge again worries some local officials. "I don't want people to think we're out of the woods just yet," said Al Gameros, the mayor of Globe.

Doctors and nurses on the front lines in Gila County said they were able to open up vaccinations for all adult residents only after meeting targets for vaccinating high-risk groups like seniors and essential workers. Because they did so well, Arizona state officials allotted the county a larger number of doses, enabling it to become one of the few places in the country that could offer the vaccine to whole adult population.

Another is Sitka, Alaska, a town of about 8,600 that is administering vaccines to anyone 16 and up.

Some places, like Amarillo in the Texas Panhandle, have become known for their willingness to set aside residency issues and vaccinate people from other states and counties who show up at their sites. But Gila County sticks strictly to its own residents.

About 28 percent of county residents have received at least one dose so far, dwarfing the nationwide level of 14 percent, according to local health officials. Rhonda Mason, the chief nursing officer at the hospital in Globe, said the vaccination process was going smoothly but that the challenge ahead was to overcome misinformation and skepticism and get even more people vaccinated.

The hospital had expected a surge in calls after opening vaccinations to all adult residents. Instead, the flow of people seeking shots has been somewhat steady. The hospital's vaccine site, which before the opening was administering more than 200 shots twice a week for people with appointments, had a walk-in session on Wednesday where about 180 people got vaccinated.

"It's a little slow going, if we're looking at getting to 70 percent for herd immunity," Ms. Mason said.



Mayor Al Gameros of Globe (left) fist-bumped with Frank Stapleton, a hospital executive, after receiving his second dose of the Moderna vaccine on Friday at the Cobre Valley Regional Medical Center. Juan Arredondo for The New York Times

Health officials were on their way to vaccinating nearly 2,000 people over the weekend at a drive-through clinic in a high school football field in Payson; hundreds of others are set to get the vaccine at hospitals or small rural walk-in clinics in the next few days.

County health officials said a number of factors allowed the county to speed through its priority target groups and open up vaccinations to everyone.

Covid-19 Vaccines >

What You Need to Know About the Vaccine Rollout

- Providers in the U.S. are administering about 1.3 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines per day, on average. Almost 30 million people have received at least one dose, and about 7 million have been fully vaccinated. [How many people have been vaccinated in your state?](#)

- The U.S. is far behind several other countries in getting its population vaccinated.
- In the near future, travel may require digital documentation showing that passengers have been vaccinated or tested for the coronavirus.
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The county's rural character may have made it easier to promote vaccine awareness — among those generally willing to get vaccinations — on social media and in local newspaper and radio coverage, said Dr. James Schouten, a family doctor in Payson.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints deployed volunteers to help get vaccinations organized.

It was also helpful that many residents were able to drive to sites in Phoenix, about 90 minutes away, easing the early demand for vaccines in Gila County.



Kay Ratcliff received her second dose at the medical center in Globe. Juan Arredondo for The New York Times

Another factor was that Gila County has hospitals in both its main towns, Payson and Globe, where residents could be vaccinated. Some rural counties in Arizona have no hospital at all.

Health officials say they also adopted a more imaginative approach to vaccinations, especially after Gila County moved past the phases for vaccinating teachers, child care workers and people 65 and older.

“We used a fairly loose definition of essential worker: those who work at the grocery store, the Dollar Store, the gas station, basically anybody who's working with the community,” said Ms. Mason, the chief nursing officer at the hospital in Globe.

And still the county had more vaccines to offer. That's when they decided to throw open the doors.

Some residents appeared to be amazed at their good luck.

“I just feel very fortunate to be one of the people to get it,” said Jordan Pace, 22, a college student who was vaccinated recently in Globe. “I can’t imagine what would happen to my family if I get the virus and then expose them to it.”



Patients waited in an observation area for 15 minutes after receiving their second vaccine doses, in case they experienced side effects. Juan Arredondo for The New York Times

At the hospital on Friday, some of those walking in for vaccines expressed surprise about the ease of the entire process. Chris Guthrie, a manager at a broadband company, said he had called the hospital just hoping to get some basic information about the vaccine.

“They told me, ‘Well, you’re an essential worker, we can get to you in 45 minutes,’” said Mr. Guthrie, 46. “Of course, I jumped at the chance.”

Natasha Rodriguez in New York and Shaena Montanari in Phoenix contributed reporting.

Simon Romero is a national correspondent based in Albuquerque, covering immigration and other issues. He was previously the bureau chief in Brazil and in Caracas, Venezuela, and reported on the global energy industry from Houston. @viaSimonRomero

LOCAL NEWS • News

New COVID-19 vaccine type is on the way, but may not mean people can pick their shot



The first box containing the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine heads down the conveyor to an awaiting transport truck at the McKesson facility on March 1, 2021, in Shepherdsville, Kentucky. The FDA has approved a third vaccine and 3.9 million doses of J&J will begin distribution. (Photo by Timothy D. Easley-Pool/Getty Images)

By **TERI SFORZA** | tsforza@scng.com and **DAVID ROSENFELD** | drosenfeld@scng.com | Orange County Register
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With doses of a new vaccine possibly arriving in California within days, health officials are pondering how best to deploy the still-scarce resource – and whether to offer people a choice in the type of shot they get.

The federal Food and Drug Administration gave emergency authorization to Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine on Saturday, Feb. 27, and California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Monday said the state could receive about 300,000 doses of it this week.

But it's not clear whether the millions of residents still waiting to be inoculated will get to select among the new J&J vaccine and the ones from Pfizer and Moderna that have been in use since mid-December.

Third option

Besides helping ease the vaccine supply crunch over time, officials have several reasons to welcome the arrival of vials from Johnson & Johnson.

In Los Angeles County, Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said last week she was looking forward to the FDA approval of the J&J vaccine because it represents two important advantages.



“It doesn’t require any freezers,” Ferrer said. “That’s good news because it makes it much more portable and allows many more sites to use it. And it’s also one dose.”

Both Pfizer’s and Moderna’s vaccines must be stored at freezing temperatures until shortly before use. Prior to [a new FDA advisory last week](#), the guidance for Pfizer was to keep it in ultra-cold freezers that pop-up vaccine sites and most clinics don’t have; now officials say it can safely be kept in typical pharmaceutical freezers for up to two weeks.

The two-dose regimen prescribed by the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require that recipients return for a second shot – 21 days later for the Pfizer vaccine and 28 days for the Moderna. The logistics, Ferrer said, creates a burden on providers and those getting the vaccine.

Having a single dose without complicated storage needs will allow smaller settings, such as local clinics, more access to vaccine doses.

“Lots of people are going to be very happy when we start getting the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, where you come in once for your vaccination and you’re done,” Ferrer said.

Officials initially thought the one-dose option might be more appropriate for harder to reach people, such as homeless people who aren’t in shelters and others who it might be harder to track down for a second appointment, Orange County Health Care Agency Director Dr. Clayton Chau told county supervisors last week.

Orange County health officials said this week their current plan is to offer people information about all three vaccines, and then give them a choice when they schedule their appointment.

While officials stress that all three vaccine types are highly effective at preventing severe disease and death from COVID-19, an FDA analysis found Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine doesn’t do quite as well with preventing milder infections – in the United States it was showing 72% effective at preventing COVID-19.

“We want the public to make an informed decision,” Orange County Deputy Health Officer Dr. Regina Chinsio-Kwong said Monday. “I don’t think we’re going to go into the game of deciding for someone what they get.”

Late last week, Riverside County public health officials said it is too early to tell if residents will get to choose which vaccine they receive because of there are “extremely limited quantities” of doses in hand right now and they don’t know when the supply might increase.

Riverside County Health Officer Dr. Cameron Kaiser said the only reason Johnson & Johnson’s efficacy is even a question is because the Pfizer and Moderna have established such good track records.

“If the J&J vaccine had come out first, it would have been a slam dunk to go get it,” he said.

San Bernardino public health officials said the question of a “choice” has not come up yet because the county doesn’t know if and when it will get any of the new J&J vaccines. But officials are advising residents to accept whichever vaccine is available as soon as they become eligible to receive it.

The one thing people need to ensure is that their second dose is the same brand as the first, officials said.

First available?

To Chinsio-Kwong, holding the J&J vaccine against Pfizer and Moderna is not really an apples-to-apples comparison, because the former was tested in countries where different variants of the coronavirus were circulating, and more data needs to be gathered on mRNA vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna.

Most health experts stress that while people with concerns may want to consult their doctor, it’s important for anyone who’s eligible to sign up for whatever vaccine is being offered.

Vaccine “shopping” among the soon-to-be inoculated is sure to happen, but “there’s the potential of really gumming up the works if people walk out of Disneyland (and Orange County mass vaccination site) because they didn’t get the vaccine they wanted,” said Andrew Noymer, epidemiologist and population health scientist at UC Irvine.

“The public health message is, take the first available vaccine that’s offered to you,” he said. “We’ve heard a lot about variants lately, and perhaps the most scary variant is the one that hasn’t emerged yet. They emerge from mutations that occur while the virus is replicating in an individual. So, the ‘OG’ (original) virus goes in, and a more dangerous variant comes out. The vaccines protect against the OG virus, which can stop it from turning into an even worse virus.

“What we need to do is vaccinate as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, using all the swords in the scabbard and arrows in the quiver,” he said.

Chinsio-Kwong noted that typical vaccine efficacy is usually between 40% and 60% – and all three COVID-19 vaccines available in the U.S. do much better than that at preventing severe disease. They’re also 100% effective at preventing hospitalization and death.



Noymer and other experts said whether people get to choose their vaccine may not be much of an issue in Southern California, with Pfizer and Moderna ramping up production while Johnson & Johnson is just getting out of the gate. (As of late February about 1.4 million people were getting vaccinated a week statewide.)

While getting a third choice in any quantity will be a help, Orange County Supervisor Doug Chaffee said the continuing uncertainty about which vaccines and how many doses will be arriving has made it frustrating for local officials trying to plan ahead and meet high demand.

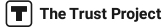
“The main thing is let’s just get some of this thing in stock – then we’ll worry about what to do with it.”

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Teri Sforza | Reporter

Teri Sforza is one of the lead reporters on the OCR/SCNG probe of fraud, abuse and death in the Southern California addiction treatment industry. Our "Rehab Riviera" coverage won first place for investigative reporting from the California Newspaper Publishers Association, first place for projects reporting from Best of the West and is a finalist for the National Institute for Health Care Management Foundation's print award, competing with the New York Times, the Washington Post and ProPublica. Sforza birthed the Watchdog column for The Orange County Register in 2008, aiming to keep a critical (but good-humored) eye on governments and nonprofits, large and small. It won first place for public service reporting from the California Newspaper Publishers Association in 2010. She also contributed to the OCR's Pulitzer Prize-winning investigation of fertility fraud at UC Irvine, covered what was then the largest municipal bankruptcy in America's history, and is the author of "The Strangest Song," the first book to tell the story of a genetic condition called Williams syndrome and the extraordinary musicality of many of the people who have it. She earned her M.F.A. from UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television, and enjoys making documentaries, including the OCR's first: "The Boy Monk," a story that was also told as a series in print. Watchdogs need help: Point us to documents that can help tell stories that need to be told, and we'll do the rest. Send tips to watchdog@ocregister.com.

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Financial hardship as a result of COVID-19?

By Fannie Mae



If you have experienced a financial hardship as a result of COVID-19, you may be eligible for a forbearance.

David Rosenfeld | Reporter

David Rosenfeld has worked as a professional journalist for more than 20 years at newspapers, magazines and websites. He's covered murder trials, interviewed governors and presidential candidates and once did a loop in a biplane for a story assignment. Before joining The Daily Breeze in 2017, David worked as a journalist in Oregon writing about health care, election integrity and the environment. In his free time, David loves outdoor sports such as sailing, mountain biking and golfing. David has a bachelor's degree from the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University.



Here is how Johnson & Johnson's vaccine differs from Pfizer's and Moderna's.



Feb. 28, 2021
By Patrick J. Lyons

A third effective weapon was added to America's arsenal against the coronavirus on Saturday when the Food and Drug Administration granted emergency use authorization for a vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson.

The company said it would start shipping millions of doses early this week, and would provide the United States with 100 million doses by the end of June. Together with 600 million doses of the nation's first two authorized vaccines, made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, that are due to be delivered over the next four months, that ought to be enough to cover every American adult who wants to be vaccinated.

The new vaccine differs markedly from the two already in use in the United States. Here is how they compare.

One shot instead of two

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is administered in a single shot, while the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are given in two shots several weeks apart.

The way it works

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine uses a different method to prime the body to fight off Covid-19: a viral vector called Ad26. Viral vectors are common viruses that have been genetically altered so that they do not cause illness but can still cause the immune system to build up its defenses. The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines use messenger RNA to do that.

How well it works

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is rated as highly effective at preventing serious illness and death, as the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are. It is also very effective at preventing milder illness, though a bit less so than those two. It appears to do well against the highly contagious B.1.351 variant, first identified in South Africa, that has given at least one other vaccine candidate trouble.

Storage and handling

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine does not have to be stored at extremely low temperatures like the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. It can safely be kept in an ordinary refrigerator for three months, much longer than the Moderna vaccine, which spoils after a month if not kept frozen.

Side effects

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine appears to be less prone than the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines to trigger the kinds of side effects that require monitoring after the injection, which may make it more suitable for use at drive-through vaccination sites. There have been reports that side effects tend to be felt more strongly after second doses, which the Johnson & Johnson vaccine does not require.

Here's the latest from **Covid-19 Live Updates: Study Shows One Dose of AstraZeneca Vaccine Protects Older People**

- [One AstraZeneca dose substantially reduced the risk of getting sick with Covid-19 for the elderly, a new study shows.](#)
- [California's governor and legislature reach an agreement on a school-reopening plan.](#)
- [High staff turnover at U.S. nursing homes was likely a factor in elderly Covid death toll, study shows.](#)

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Johnson & Johnson vaccine deepens concerns over racial and geographic inequities

Decisions to send it to harder-to-reach communities make practical sense, but could drive perceptions of a two-tiered system.

By **Isaac Stanley-Becker**

March 1, 2021 at 3:11 p.m. PST



The nation has a third weapon to wield against the coronavirus, and this one doesn't need to be kept frozen or followed by a booster shot.

Those attributes of Johnson & Johnson's coronavirus vaccine, which gained regulatory clearance on Saturday, promise to help state and local officials quell the pandemic. First, however, they will need to determine its place in an expanding anti-virus arsenal, where it joins vaccines with sky-high efficacy rates that are still in short supply.

Decisions to send the shots to harder-to-reach communities make practical sense, because Johnson & Johnson's single-shot vaccine is easier to store and use. But they could drive perceptions of a two-tiered vaccine system, riven along racial or class lines — with marginalized communities getting what they think is an inferior product.

The issue came up on a recent call between governors and Biden administration officials coordinating the country's coronavirus response. Gov. Charlie Baker, a Massachusetts Republican and former health insurance executive, stressed the need for prominent health officials to communicate clearly about the benefits of the one-shot vaccine, according to three people who heard his remarks and spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a private conversation.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine proved safe and effective in a clinical trial, completely preventing hospitalization and death, including in South Africa against a more transmissible variant. When moderate cases were included, however, it was 66 percent protective, compared to efficacy of more than 90 percent reported for a vaccine jointly developed by U.S. pharmaceutical giant Pfizer and German biotech firm BioNTech, and one from U.S. biotech company Moderna. Trials were conducted at different points during the pandemic, and in different countries with different transmission rates, which makes head-to-head comparisons impossible.

The apparent differences, Baker said, could nonetheless create uncomfortable questions for state and local leaders promoting the new vaccine to people who might ask, as one person paraphrased his comments, "Why didn't you give us the good stuff?"

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“J&J is going to be a challenge for all of us,” Washington Gov. Jay Inslee (D) said in an interview.

In North Dakota, which has achieved one of the fastest rates of inoculation, Gov. Doug Burgum (R) said the new product intensified concerns not just about “vaccine hesitancy, but the potential for brand hesitancy as well.” The problem has been on display in Germany, where some residents are shunning shots developed by AstraZeneca in favor of those made by Pfizer-BioNTech, because of the different levels of protection reported in clinical trials, according to officials there.

The challenge in the United States is especially acute in the context of the racial and economic disparities exacerbated by the pandemic, according to state and local officials. If a vaccine thought to be less effective — though still well above the threshold of 50 percent set forth last summer by federal regulators — is used overwhelmingly in communities of color, it could erode trust.

The Biden administration signaled this week it was concerned about that possibility, as senior administration officials stressed that the new vaccine would be shared equally throughout the country. “All vaccines will reach all communities,” Marcella Nunez-Smith, who heads the administration’s coronavirus equity task force, said during a Monday briefing.

Fulfilling that promise is critical, advocates said.

“If we end up with a hierarchy that says all rich White people get Pfizer, and all poor Black people get J&J, that would be a problem,” said Helene D. Gayle, president and chief executive of the Chicago Community Trust, one of the largest community foundations in the country.

To complicate matters further, these dilemmas are inseparable from characteristics of the new vaccine that make it a logistical gift. The easier storage and scheduling requirements position the Johnson & Johnson product to penetrate hard-to-reach populations, such as those without housing, as well as transient groups, including people moving through the criminal justice system.

Because people of color are overrepresented in both populations, however, the racial undertones of a targeted approach to distribution could become pronounced.

“There is a risk of that,” acknowledged Mouhanad Hammami, director of the Wayne County Health Department, which serves Detroit as well as suburbs that include some of the richest Zip codes in Michigan.

The risk, too, is that residents may try to be selective about which vaccine they’re getting. “We hold our clinics based on the vaccine made available to us, so we have a Pfizer clinic or a Moderna clinic,” he said. “And probably people will come — or choose not to come — based on the product being offered.”

That is unwise, specialists said. “The vaccine that’s available to you, get that vaccine,” Anthony S. Fauci, the nation’s leading infectious-disease expert, said during a briefing on the eve of Johnson & Johnson’s authorization.

But Inslee said his constituents naturally want options, and with more supply in the near future, that may be possible. In the meantime, his pitch for Johnson & Johnson is simply this: “It’s going to save your life, which we think is a pretty

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Burgum said the one-shot vaccine may be especially appealing to younger or less vulnerable people, stressing that no one should be “assigned something they feel is less effective,” even if the numbers don’t support that conclusion. During a meeting of a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advisory group on Sunday, a college president in Iowa said the easier-to-use vaccine should be rushed to 18- to 29-year-olds, a highly mobile population that includes “some of our biggest spreaders.”

At 42, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said he would prefer to take the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. “I’m just going to get one shot and be done,” the Republican said last week.

At first, few people will have the option of passing on the Johnson & Johnson vaccine because there’s so little of it. Nearly 4 million doses are expected to be shipped this week to states and other jurisdictions, as well as to pharmacies and federally administered sites. Company executives have promised 20 million doses by the end of March, and federal officials say production is supposed to pick up considerably in April.

The federal government is not specifying how states should allocate the new vaccine, although senior administration officials said federal oversight would guard against concentrating its use in certain communities. Officials in several states said Monday they were still deciding where to direct their first allotments.

In testimony before a House subcommittee last week, Richard Nettles, vice president of U.S. medical affairs for Johnson & Johnson’s Janssen division, said the vaccine was “tested at the height of the pandemic globally, and included a significant number of participants from South Africa” and other places where threatening variants of the virus have emerged. The vaccine was found to be more than 80 percent effective at preventing severe illness in South Africa — a performance that stands out because the other two vaccines authorized in the United States have not been tested against variants.

But state and local health officials have yet to communicate these attributes to the public, because they’ve been reluctant to get ahead of the Food and Drug Administration.

A similar dynamic has been at play in the White House, where officials have been crafting communication about the new vaccine but are conscious of the need to tailor it to the recommendations of federal regulators and other experts. President Biden, in a statement Saturday night, praised the authorization of a third vaccine as “exciting news for all Americans.” In a White House video posted Sunday on social media, Fauci was more direct, affirming, “I would definitely take the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.”

“Most of the messaging has been press releases,” acknowledged Helen “Keipp” Talbot, an infectious-disease specialist at Vanderbilt University and a member of the CDC advisory panel that makes recommendations about how vaccines should be used. “It’s incredibly important that we start providing information about the vaccine in a clear and transparent way.”

There is disagreement about how to do that, however, especially about how much detail the public needs. Gayle, a former CDC official, said, “We should be able to craft messages that make it clear you’re not getting an inferior product if you’re getting the J&J vaccine. You’re getting vaccinated.”

She also stressed the communal benefits of vaccination, saying it matters less what product “you get individually” than

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vaccine advisory group in Massachusetts, also emphasized the remarkable performance of all three authorized vaccines. But he cautioned against papering over possible differences, saying he was interested in whether a second shot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine might “look as good as Pfizer and Moderna.” The company is studying that, and expects to have results later this year.

“Equity means assuring those who have suffered most from this pandemic ... are clearly able to access the most effective therapies with the data we have at the time,” Biddinger said.

He also said it was wrong to assume that “communities of color or hard-hit communities are more in need of a single-shot regimen.” Community health centers and other vaccinators catering to hard-hit populations, he said, “have proved they can handle the logistics of cold storage and the execution of two-shot regimens.”

The East Boston Neighborhood Health Center is already ramping up to 6,000 vaccinations a week across four sites, said Manny Lopes, the center’s president and chief executive. Mostly, people just want to be vaccinated, he said. Some ask about the difference between Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, and staff members are anticipating similar questions about Johnson & Johnson, he said.

In his view, Baker was right to raise concerns about how to present the data supporting the new vaccine, especially if it ends up being directed at certain populations.

“We feel confident that we’ll be able to answer based on science,” Lopes said. “It’s very, very effective, and we will share that information with our community.”

Amy Goldstein contributed to this story.

Updated February 24, 2021

Coronavirus: What you need to read

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< Covid-19 Live Updates: Study Shows One Dose of AstraZeneca Vaccine Protects Older People

Here is what we know about the rollout of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.



2 hours ago

By Patrick J. Lyons

When Johnson & Johnson's coronavirus vaccine won emergency use authorization on Saturday from the Food and Drug Administration, the move augmented the nation's vaccination effort with a third major tool — one that differs markedly from the first two authorized vaccines, made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.

Most notably, it is administered in a single dose instead of two, and can be kept unfrozen in an ordinary refrigerator for up to three months — features that promise greater flexibility as public health officials try to immunize Americans as quickly as possible.

Much is still to be determined about how this new tool will be used. Here is what we know so far.

When will people start getting the new vaccine?

Within the next few days. Johnson & Johnson started shipping out doses on Monday, and they can be used as soon as they reach vaccination sites starting on Tuesday.

Will adding the new supply speed up vaccination efforts?

At first, the increase in availability will be limited. The company had about 3.9 million doses on hand to ship right away, but after that, deliveries could be patchy for a few weeks. (For comparison, the nation is using up that many doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines in a little more than two days.)

By the end of March, Johnson & Johnson says it will ship roughly 16 million more doses. Even so, the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines will continue to make up the majority of the nation's supply.

How is the new vaccine being allocated?

The same way the two earlier vaccines are: in proportion to each state or territory's population.

Who will get the new vaccine?

That's still under discussion. The Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention has said that the vaccine can be given to people 18 and over, and state officials are working out what their policies will be.

Because the new vaccine is given in a single shot and doesn't require cold storage, some experts and officials have suggested directing it toward hard-to-reach segments of the population (like rural residents or the homeless), or to people who might not keep an appointment for a second shot (like college students or those with mobility issues).

But there is concern about appearing to favor or disfavor some groups, and the Biden administration has said it would insist that the new vaccine be distributed equitably.

Will I be able to choose which vaccine I receive?

That's not clear. Right now, people are getting whichever vaccine the site has on hand when their turn comes, and appointment scheduling systems generally don't tell users beforehand which it will be. Depending on how states decide to deploy the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, though, it may be possible to effectively choose what you get by choosing where you sign up to get it.

Which vaccine should I prefer?

Health experts say the best shot is the one you can get the soonest, whichever one it turns out to be. All three authorized vaccines are highly protective, and the differences among them pale in comparison, they say, with the risk you would run by being picky and passing up a chance to get a shot because it was not your top choice.

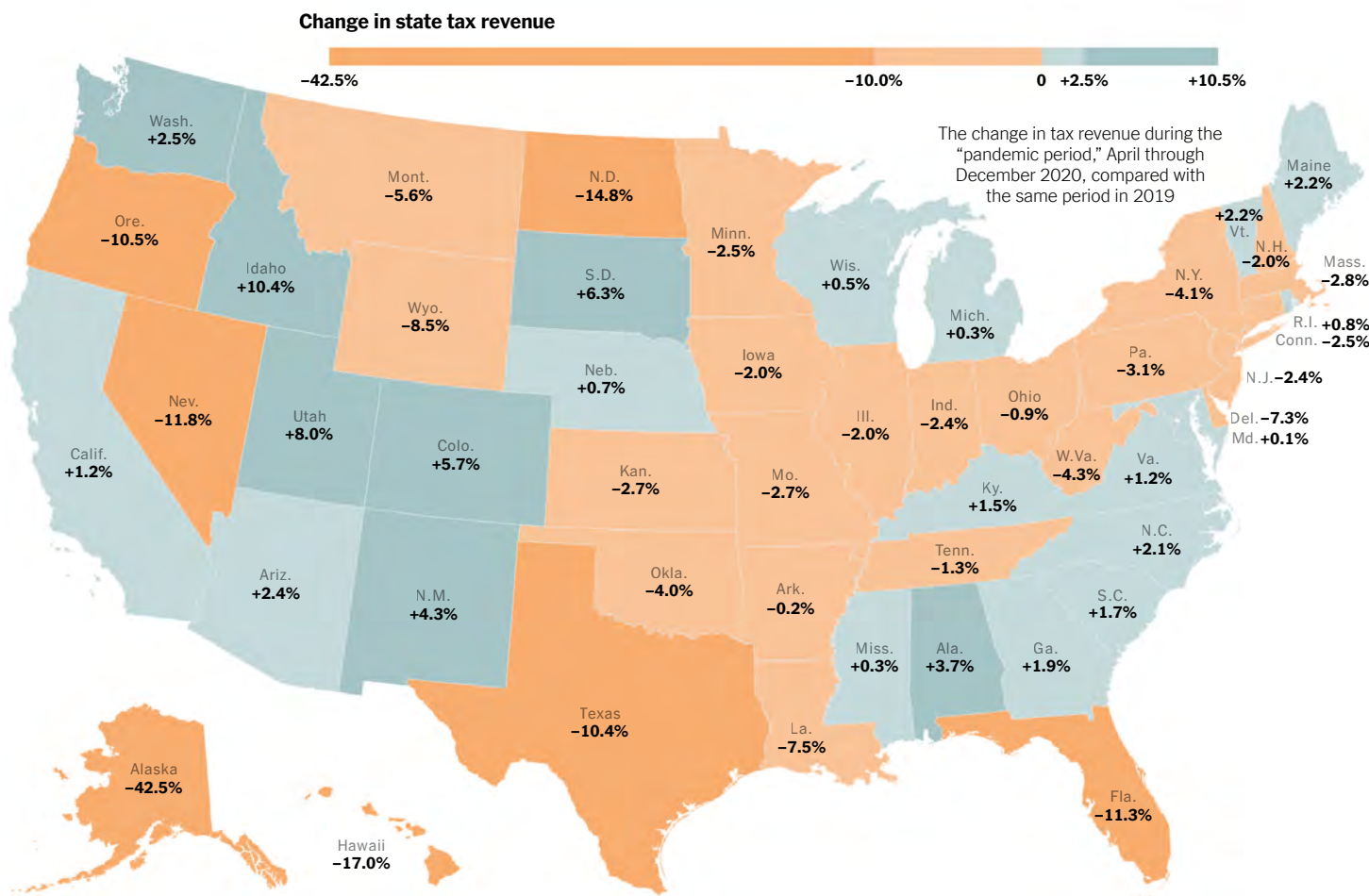
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Virus Did Not Bring Financial Rout That Many States Feared

Grim forecasts held up for a few states, but many took in about as much tax revenue as before the pandemic — sometimes a lot more.



Source: Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center



By Mary Williams Walsh Graphics by Karl Russell

March 1, 2021 Updated 5:59 p.m. ET

Throughout the debate over stimulus measures, one question has repeatedly brought gridlock in Washington: Should the states get no-strings federal aid?

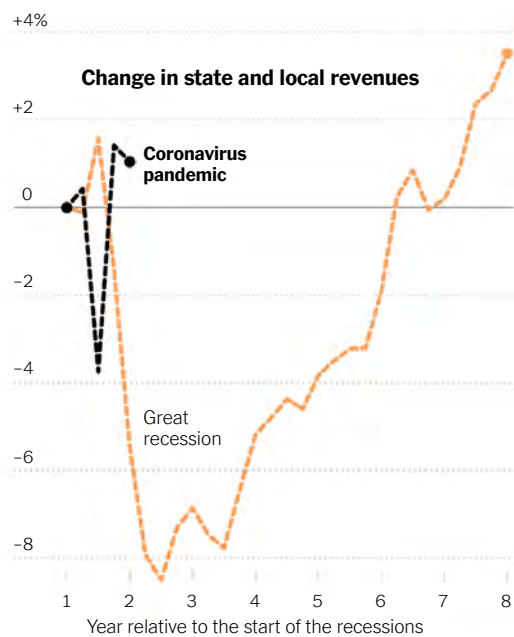
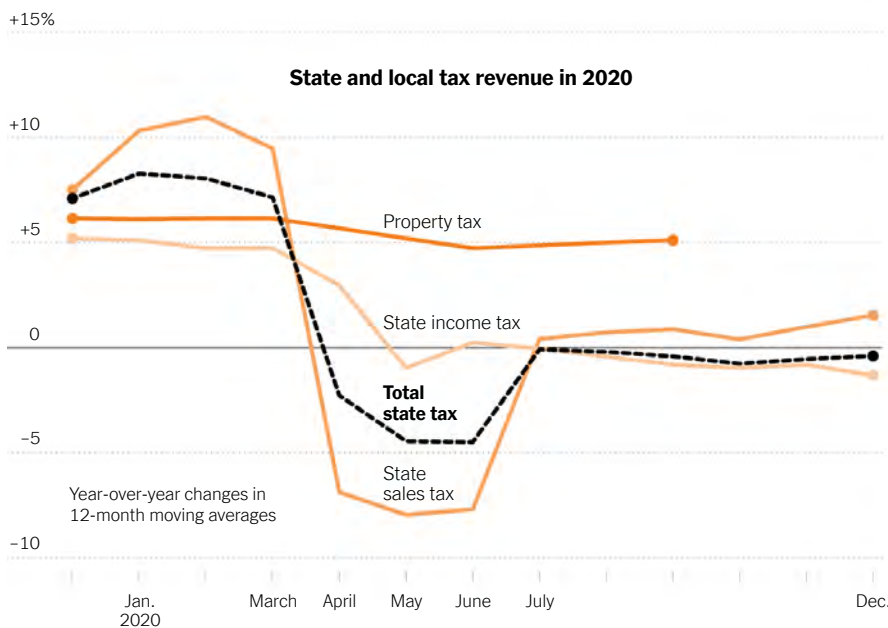
Republicans have mostly said no, casting it as a bailout for spendthrift blue states. Democrats have argued the opposite, saying that states face dire fiscal consequences without aid, and included \$350 billion in relief for state and local governments in President Biden's \$1.9 trillion federal stimulus bill, which narrowly passed the House this past weekend. It faces a much tougher fight in the Senate.

As it turns out, new data shows that a year after the pandemic wrought economic devastation around the country, forcing states to revise their revenue forecasts and prepare for the worst, for many the worst didn't come. One big reason: \$600-a-week federal supplements that allowed people to keep spending — and states to keep collecting sales tax revenue — even when they were jobless, along with the usual state unemployment benefits.

By some measures, the states ended up collecting nearly as much revenue in 2020 as they did in 2019. A J.P. Morgan survey called 2020 “virtually flat” with 2019, based on the 47 states that report their tax revenues every month, or all except Alaska, Oregon and Wyoming.

A researcher at the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center, a nonpartisan think tank, found that total state revenues from April through December were down just 1.8 percent from the same period in 2019. Moody’s Analytics used a different method and found that 31 states now had enough cash to fully absorb the economic stress of the pandemic recession on their own.

“You can see it’s just a completely different story this time,” said Louise Sheiner, a Brookings Institution economist whose research showed that over all, the states struggled far less during the pandemic than in previous recessions.



Note: Figures do not include federal transfers. • Sources: Urban Institute, the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis, via Louise Sheiner (Brookings Institution)

New Jersey, for instance, managed to avoid financial calamity despite a dire forecast when the pandemic started, because of better-than-expected tax revenue from retail sales and high earners, who lost fewer jobs and reaped the benefits of a bullish stock market. However, it still had to borrow \$4 billion in emergency relief.

The findings are being cited by Republican lawmakers. In a Feb. 2 blog post, the House minority leader, Kevin McCarthy, Republican of California, said the J.P. Morgan report was evidence that the states were doing just fine. He called on Democrats not to insist on “blue-state slush funds that are not needed.”

At the same time, Democrats have said states need relief even if their revenues are resilient, because their costs will spiral as schools reopen and vaccination programs roll out.

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Down and Up

States need revenue to function. For day-to-day operations, they raise money by collecting different kinds of taxes: sales taxes, income taxes, property taxes, and taxes on singular transactions like energy production or gasoline sales. (For public works, they issue bonds.)

Most state tax collections plunged last spring when shutdown orders started and millions were thrown out of work as businesses closed. That prompted many states to issue doomsday forecasts, lay off workers and turn to Washington for billions of dollars in aid to replace revenue they were expecting to lose. Many feared a replay of the Great Recession, when state revenues fell 8 percent and took more than five years to recover, exacerbating the overall downturn.

But this time, after falling 4 percent over all, Ms. Sheiner said, tax collections turned back up again, all in the span of a few months. She and other public finance experts cautioned that the numbers didn't tell the full story. With new variants of the virus emerging, the pandemic isn't over yet, and revenues could slip again — just as states increase spending amid signs of an economic rebound.

Also, averaging the states' revenues — the J.P. Morgan report used weighted averages to show that revenues last year were down just 0.06 percent from 2019 — can mask the pain of the states whose tax collections have not yet rebounded. And focusing just on state revenue collection glosses over the weakness of local governments, which administer many social services under state administration.

The Coronavirus Outbreak ›

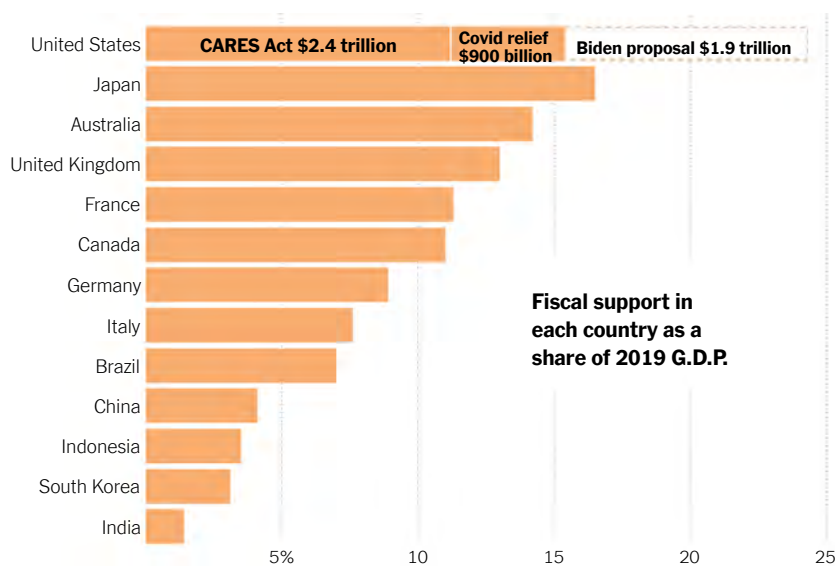
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“We know that local governments are doing far worse than the states,” said Lucy Dadayan, a senior research associate at the Tax Policy Center.

The Stimulus Bump



Source: Moody's Analytics

No matter how they measured the states' rebound, the analysts said the federal stimulus money that began to flow to consumers and small businesses late in March — especially the extraordinary support for the jobless through the end of July — had helped greatly. Those programs allowed consumer spending to continue, even as unemployment surged to levels not seen since the 1930s.

During the Great Recession, Congress sent supplements of just \$25 a week. This time, Washington sent supplements of \$600 a week. Since the pandemic ravaged low-wage sectors like retail sales and restaurants, adding \$600 a week to the lowest unemployment benefits pushed many recipients' purchasing power above what they had while working.

In Illinois, for example, per capita personal income actually rose as the pandemic kicked in. It climbed to \$66,224 in the second quarter, from \$59,896 in the first, according to the state's Office of Management and Budget.

Consumer spending, in turn, bolstered the states' sales tax revenues. The federal unemployment benefits also buoyed income tax receipts in the 36 states that tax unemployment benefits.

The Federal Reserve helped indirectly by making credit widely available at very low interest rates, prompting investors to leave the safety of the bond markets and buy stocks. That fueled an enormous stock-market rally, which ultimately gave states including New Jersey capital gains to tax.

The Coronavirus Outbreak >

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- Are coronavirus case counts rising in your region? [Our maps](#) will help you determine how your [state](#), [county](#) or [country](#) is faring.
- Vaccines are rolling out and will reach many of us by spring. [We've answered some common questions](#) about the vaccines.
- Now that we are all getting used to living in a pandemic, you may have [new questions](#) about how to go about your routine safely, how your children will be impacted, how to travel and more. [We're answering those questions](#) as well.
- So far, the coronavirus outbreak has sickened more than 106 million people globally. More than two million people have died. [A timeline of the events](#) that led to these numbers may help you understand how we got here.

Many states also benefited from tax-law changes enacted before the pandemic, after a 2018 Supreme Court decision that let them compel out-of-state retailers to collect sales taxes on online purchases. The new laws ended years of legal wrangling over how to tax such sales, just in time to help the states weather the pandemic-induced shift to online shopping.

“If the Covid-19 pandemic had occurred even five years earlier than it did, the impacts to state and local sales taxes would have been truly devastating,” Dan White, director of government consulting and public finance research at Moody’s, said.

Windfalls for Some States

In his survey, Peter DeGroot, head of municipal research and strategy at J.P. Morgan, found a handful of states, including Idaho, South Dakota and New Mexico, that managed to take in even more money last year than in 2019. The survey also identified several states where tax revenues have not yet bounced back because they depend heavily on tourism, oil and gas, or coal extraction — among them Hawaii, Nevada, Florida, Texas and West Virginia.

Ms. Sheiner’s analysis showed that Idaho had the biggest revenue recovery of any state. She conducted her research with Byron Lutz, an economist with the Federal Reserve.

The head of Idaho’s Division of Financial Management, Alex J. Adams, said in an interview that the rebound had taken officials by surprise, and that they thought one reason was an influx of new residents from California, seeking to escape that state’s high cost of living — a trend that started before the pandemic but accelerated last year. Mr. Adams also said Idaho didn’t pause construction when the lockdowns happened, which helped economic activity.

Idaho’s Republican governor, Brad Little, said in his State of the State address in January that 2020 revenue collections were strong enough to send \$295 million back to the taxpayers, and still have enough to invest in better highways, bridges and broadband access. He also wrote to Idaho’s congressional delegation last year, urging it to oppose the use of no-strings federal dollars to bail out mismanaged states.

With some states now “enjoying windfalls” and others still struggling, Mr. White said a smaller amount of money, more carefully targeted to the states that needed it most, would be the most efficient approach for Congress. But getting assistance to those governments that truly need it, without sending unnecessary aid to those that do not, will require some “exceptional creativity,” he said.

Timing Played a Role

To some extent, the states’ surprising recoveries reflect the timing of events last year. The pandemic started just as many state lawmakers were reviewing initial budget proposals for the coming fiscal year. The proposals, drawn up weeks before the shock, forecast a year of strong tax collections.

Then, in a matter of weeks, millions of people lost their jobs. State officials think of unemployment as a powerful driver of their fiscal affairs; research from past recessions suggests that a single percentage-point increase in the unemployment rate can produce \$45 billion worth of state budget woe.

So they braced for disaster. Most states tore up their initial budgets, laid off workers and, like the federal government, pushed back their April income-tax deadlines to mid-July. Income tax receipts plummeted.

In April, the National Governors Association called on Congress to appropriate \$500 billion “to meet the states’ budgetary shortfalls.” But the \$500 billion of no-strings budget relief did not materialize. Most state lawmakers finished their budgets by the end of June and went home — and were not on hand to see the wave of income-tax revenue that arrived in mid-July.

By the end of July, revenue had recovered to 2019 levels and stayed there, said Ms. Sheiner, the policy director of the Hutchins Center on Fiscal and Monetary Policy at the Brookings Institution. Ms. Sheiner said she and her colleagues had been pointing out the signs of a recovery since September, but state officials remain guarded. They have not yet begun hiring back the 1.3 million public workers they laid off.

“If you talk to state and local government officers, they’re really cautious,” she said. “There’s so much uncertainty. They’re thinking, What if it goes back to how it was last spring?”

Mary Williams Walsh is a reporter covering the intersection of finance, public policy and the aging population. She previously worked for The Wall Street Journal and The Los Angeles Times, mainly in foreign bureaus. [@marywalshnyt](#) • [Facebook](#)

NEWS

Masks? Global warming? Chapman survey shows OC voters lean left of perception on several issues

The county's anti-mask reputation is not supported by the data. Same for ideas about race, global warming and Trump.



Shoppers wear masks as they make their way through the South Coast Plaza retail shopping center in Costa Mesa on Thursday, June 11, 2020, after it was closed for three months due to the coronavirus. (Photo by Mark Rightmire, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By **ANDRE MOUCHARD** | amouchard@scng.com | Orange County Register

PUBLISHED: March 1, 2021 at 5:47 p.m. | UPDATED: March 2, 2021 at 10:28 a.m.



Masks?

Actually, in Orange County, the answer is most likely “sure.”

Despite the county’s recent reputation as a hotbed of voters who flout mask-wearing and other social distancing rules, the [2021 Orange County Annual Survey from Chapman University](#) shows seven out of 10 local voters support a national mask mandate, and similar majorities back other science-friendly views on preventing the spread of COVID-19, including ranking public health over perceived short-term economic gains.

The numbers suggest that high-profile, anti-mask sentiment expressed by some elected officials in Orange County, and a broader push by some supervisors and others to “open the economy” while the pandemic remains a threat, has not found an audience beyond a few pockets of the county.

“Elected officials pay too much attention to noisy people,” said Fred Smoller, an associate professor of political science at Chapman.

While Smoller said the county’s image on mask-wearing and social distancing has been shaped by “public demonstrations and flag waving,” and by “the intensity” of anti-mask proponents, the survey results suggest that’s not true for most Orange County residents.

“Most people in the county back science.”

A similar trend reflects local views about former President Donald Trump and his inaccurate claim that he won the last election.

The survey, released Monday, March 1, also shows county residents generally believe (69% to 31%) that the 2020 election was fair and that it was correct to impeach Trump (57% to 43%) a second time following his role in inciting the Jan. 6 insurrection.

In fact, on a range of issues, from global warming to electric cars to support for the Black Lives Matter movement, Chapman’s new data shows Orange County either in-step with national numbers or leaning slightly to the left.

Global warming? A strong majority (73%) of Orange County residents believe the issue is either a “serious problem” or a problem for which “some action is required.” Nationally, some 76% of voters described global warming as “a crisis” or a “severe problem,” according to a poll from Quinnipiac University released early last month.



Renewable energy? A majority (58%) favor the state's law that will require all energy in California to be renewable by 2045, even if that means higher electric bills. Nationally, 60% of voters told Gallup two years ago that they would "strongly favor" or "favor" national policies to achieve similar goals over the next 20 years.

Race relations? A solid majority (65%) of Orange County residents back the Black Lives Matter movement. Nationally, 51% of voters told CNN last year that they had favorable views of Black Lives Matter.

Smoller, who has tracked local political trends since the 1980s, said the survey results are in line with a county that has voted for the past two Democratic candidates for president (Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden), and where voting registration data shows Democrats with a small but growing lead over Republicans. (As of Monday, March 1, data from the Orange County Registrar of voters shows Democrats with a 50,186 voter edge – about 2.7 percentage points – over the GOP.)

But Chapman's data also shows a county that's still narrowly divided politically. In fact, two of the 16 congressional districts across the country that split tickets in 2020 election – meaning voters chose a congressional representative from a party that was different than one of the presidential candidate they backed – are in Orange County, CA-39 and CA-48. Those seats, one that touches north Orange County as well as San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties, and another that includes much of coastal Orange County, are represented by GOP Reps. Young Kim and Michelle Steel. Voters in both districts chose Biden over Trump in November.

And while the Republicans and Democrats who responded to Chapman's survey fell in line with national numbers on a variety of issues, a third group, identified in the survey as Decline to State voters, swung the county's overall results to the left.

At least some of those voters are former Republicans who backed candidates such as Mitt Romney and John McCain, but who aren't inclined to support Trump or others who are voted to dismiss the results of the 2020 election and who back policies that recently would have been considered extremist.

"There seem to be more people in the middle in Orange County than there are around the country," Smoller said. "There are a lot of moderate Republicans here." Such voters, he added, won't identify as Democrats – "probably ever" – but "they're going to push back from the kind of conservatism that's being offered right now by Trump and others."





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BUSINESS

Californians need higher wages and better jobs, Newsom commission says



Gov. Gavin Newsom appointed a Future of Work Commission to study California's workforce and economy. (Associated Press)

By MARGOT ROOSEVELT | STAFF WRITER

MARCH 2, 2021 5 AM PT



California's high poverty rate, low wages and frayed public safety net require a new "social compact" between workers, business and government, according to a report by a blue-ribbon commission that highlights the state's widening inequality.

In a [report](#) released Tuesday, the Future of Work Commission, a 21-member body appointed by Gov. Gavin Newsom in August 2019, laid out a grim picture of the challenges facing the world's fifth-largest economy, even as it acknowledged the Golden State's technology leadership, its ethnically and culturally diverse workforce and world-class universities.

“Too many Californians have not fully participated in or enjoyed the benefits of the state’s broader economic success and the extraordinary wealth generated here, especially workers of color who are disproportionately represented in low-wage industries,” the report says.

California has the highest poverty rate in the country when accounting for the cost of living, 17.2%, according to the report. Since 2012, wages in the state grew by 14% while home prices increased by 68%.

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Half of California’s spending on public assistance programs such as Medicaid and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families goes to recipients in working families. Working people of color are over three times more likely than white workers to live in poverty.

And the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the challenges: Among California’s low-wage workers, 53% are employed in essential occupations, which are most [vulnerable to the virus](#), compared with 39% of workers in middle- and high-wage occupations, many of whom are able to work from home, according to the report.

A 'full reverse': California joblessness spiked in December, thwarting recovery

Jan. 22, 2021

The report says less than half of California workers are in “quality jobs,” which it defines as “providing a living wage, stable and predictable pay, [control over scheduling](#), access to benefits, a safe and dignified work environment, and opportunities for training and career advancement.”

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The commission called for “bold, measurable moon-shot goals” by 2030 to tackle the state’s myriad challenges. It was co-chaired by James Manyika, director of McKinsey Global Institute, the consultancy’s research arm, and Mary Kay Henry, president of the Service Employees International Union, California’s largest labor group. It included

government officials, business executives, civic leaders and academics and sets out an ambitious agenda for the next decade.

Among the recommendations:

- Guarantee the creation of enough jobs for all Californians who want to work.
- Eliminate poverty among working Californians by raising wages.
- Double the share of California workers who have access to employment-tied benefits.
- Create a “California Job Quality Index” and steer state procurement to companies that create high-quality jobs.
- “Rebalance power” with employers through worker organizations and unions.

“It’s a call to action,” said Julie Su, secretary of California’s Labor and Workforce Development Agency, who was nominated last month to be deputy secretary of Labor in the Biden administration.

BUSINESS

New year brings new laws to California workplaces

Jan. 5, 2021

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Unlike similar reports published by nonprofit and business groups in recent years, the California report does not mainly focus on commonly cited forces of economic disruption, including [automation](#) and skills gaps, she said.

“It takes a different tack: It’s about improving the quality of jobs. And what has to happen is that workers need more power in the workplace.”

Over 18 months, the commission met 11 times in six cities but went virtual when the pandemic hit. It heard testimony from 42 workers, business leaders, academics, public officials and community activists, invited public comments, and pored over 36 studies and other documents. All meeting videos and documents are posted on [its website](#).

The diversity of commission members was “unusual,” said Manyika, whose McKinsey group has published four major Future of Work reports. “With other efforts, you have mostly like-minded people. It was a remarkable achievement to agree on these goals.”

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In the face of the state’s economic crisis — unemployment in December stood at 9% — the state and federal governments can act as “a backstop to guarantee all Californians a

job through incentives for private sector job creation or public employment,” the report said.

At least a million jobs could be created in clean energy technologies, residential solar and electric cars, it added, furthering Newsom’s initiatives to combat climate change.

One way to raise wages, the report suggests, would be to create regional wage floors using MIT’s widely accepted living wage calculator that factors in cost of living. Workers in the low-paid hospitality, retail and care sectors could benefit first.

The report argues union representation is significant in reducing low-wage employment. The share of California workers who are unionized has declined from 24% in 1980 to [16.5% in 2019](#).

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Although most labor law is federally determined, “the commission calls for rewriting the rules to make sure all working people are free to join together in unions,” said Henry, the SEIU leader.

“There’s tremendous employer resistance to unions,” she said. “But we have a commission agreeing that a key lever on racial and economic inequality is the ability of workers to collectively bargain. We’ve not had a chorus of voices on that point before. It’s a big shift.”

NEWS > NATIONAL NEWS • News

Las Vegas panel seeks ideas for mass shooting memorial

"Whether you live in Las Vegas, in California or anywhere else in the world, we want to hear from you"



FILE – In this Oct. 1, 2019, file photo, people pray at a makeshift memorial for shooting victims in Las Vegas, on the anniversary of the mass shooting two years earlier. A panel planning a permanent memorial to the October 2017 shooting on the Las Vegas Strip made a nationwide call on Monday, March 1, 2021, for ideas about how best to remember the 58 people killed and thousands affected by the deadliest massacre in modern U.S. history. (AP Photo/John Locher, File)

By **THE ASSOCIATED PRESS** |

PUBLISHED: March 1, 2021 at 2:46 p.m. | UPDATED: March 1, 2021 at 2:48 p.m.

By **Ken Ritter** | Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — A panel planning a permanent memorial to the 2017 massacre on the Las Vegas Strip made a nationwide call on Monday for ideas about how best to remember the 58 people killed and thousands affected by the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

"Should the memorial be a park, monument, sculpture or something else?" Clark County Commission Chairman Marilyn Kirkpatrick asked in a statement released as officials launched a website questionnaire to collect comments from anyone for the next two weeks.

"Where should the memorial be located?"



County officials said ticket sales suggested as many as two-thirds of the 22,000 people who attended the ill-fated open-air country music festival were from other states.

“Whether you live in Las Vegas, in California or anywhere else in the world, we want to hear from you,” county Commissioner Jim Gibson said.

The 15-acre venue where the shooting happened has remained idle since concert-goers fled and fell beneath volleys of gunfire unleashed by a lone gunman with a cache of assault-style weapons from an upper floor of the Mandalay Bay resort across Las Vegas Boulevard.

The 64-year-old gunman, Stephen Paddock, killed himself before police reached him. Police and the FBI said he meticulously planned the attack and appeared to seek notoriety, but concluded they could not identify a single or clear motive for the shooting.

The hotel and the festival site are owned by MGM Resorts International, which announced plans more than a year ago to remake it into a community center for events like high school basketball and indoor soccer — along with space to honor victims of the shooting.

Tennille Pereira, director of a multi-agency referral and support program for victims and families dubbed the Vegas Strong Resiliency Center, told reporters Monday the questionnaire asks whether the memorial should be at the site or somewhere else.

“Is it important that it include a sculpture? Other creative artwork?” she asked. “Should it be interactive? Should it allow for mementoes to be left?”

“We need those that were impacted by this horrible tragedy to be involved,” she said.

The eight-page questionnaire asks for respondents’ ZIP codes but not their names. Responses are being accepted through March 14.

The 1 October Memorial Committee began work in November to identify a location, size, design and funding for a memorial in Clark County — the jurisdiction that covers the Las Vegas Strip.

The panel, headed by Pereira, has been studying memorials to lives lost in other mass shootings and acts of terrorism, including the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, Oklahoma City bombing that killed at least 168 people in 1995 and the Orlando nightclub shooting that killed 49 people in 2016. Officials note that each of those took several years to build.

The memorial will be separate from a Community Healing Garden created in downtown Las Vegas following the shooting, where trees were planted for victims. That site has hosted annual memorials since 2018 including the reading of names of the dead.

Officials determined victims were from Nevada, California, 13 other U.S. states and Canada. More than 400 people were wounded and hundreds more were injured fleeing gunfire.

Last October, Mayor Carolyn Goodman read 60 names, to include two people who later died from injuries authorities attributed to their shooting wounds.

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The Associated Press



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LOCAL NEWS • News

Will San Bernardino reject both bids for Carousel Mall redevelopment?

Two council members have questioned Mayor John Valdivia's alleged dealings with one of the developers



In this file photo from 1999, the Carousel Mall, that generated a short-lived downtown renaissance when it was opened in 1972, is largely vacant. (File photo by David Bauman, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

By **BRIAN WHITEHEAD** | bwhitehead@scng.com | The Sun
 PUBLISHED: March 1, 2021 at 1:53 p.m. | UPDATED: March 1, 2021 at 1:58 p.m.

More than a month after two developers presented their plans to [overhaul the Carousel Mall](#) property, city staffers recommend elected officials reject both bids and instead incorporate redevelopment of the site into a larger revitalization effort in downtown San Bernardino.

According to a staff report prepared for the City Council meeting Wednesday, March 3, integrating the shuttered shopping center and the downtown district into a consolidated plan “will allow for more cohesive long-term development,” attract developers who share the city’s vision for its entertainment corridor and “reduce the risk typically associated with development in the urban core of a city.”

Additionally, staffers say, the city may be better served dividing the 43-acre mall property into four or more planning areas.

“Smaller planning areas,” the report reads, “would increase the financial viability of developing various types of residential, commercial and mixed-use projects on the Carousel Mall property. Engaging multiple development entities interested in the planning areas improves the likelihood that individual projects will be successfully completed, and will allow smaller firms the opportunity to develop parts of the project site.”

While staffers have offered their input, city leaders on Wednesday also could select either Shanghai Conglomerate Group America or the team of Renaissance Downtowns USA and ICO Real Estate Group to move forward as master developer for the entire mall property.

Should the council choose a preferred firm or firms, staffers would return with a resolution supporting the move.



San Bernardino officials are about two years removed from the day [they rebooted plans](#) to overhaul the Carousel Mall site.

In December 2019, about seven months after the city [solicited interest](#) in redeveloping the property, SCG America, Renaissance Downtowns USA and ICO Real Estate Group [emerged](#) as finalists from a field of nearly a dozen hopefuls. Late last year, they were [commissioned](#) to craft comprehensive plans to revamp the area.

The developers shared their proposals with the City Council Jan. 27.

Last week, Councilmembers Ben Reynoso and Kimberly Calvin, who, along with Councilmember Damon Alexander, were not on the dais when the companies were selected as finalists for the mall project, [questioned](#) Mayor John Valdivia's alleged dealings with SCG America.

Reynoso and Calvin said last week that before they took office in December, Valdivia showed them an eight-minute video promoting the work of the Garden Grove firm, which has a subsidiary linked to [a wide-ranging pay-to-play scheme in Los Angeles](#) where developers bribed city leaders to secure contracts for their real estate projects.

Calvin, who has [butted heads with Valdivia on multiple occasions](#) since being sworn in Dec. 16, urged city officials and city counsel to investigate SCG America and its subsidiaries for any connections to San Bernardino leaders.

She and Reynoso also said last week that an SCG America representative obtained their personal cell phone numbers and contacted them following the Jan. 27 meeting.

Valdivia has refuted all allegations of impropriety.

The City Council meets at 7 p.m. Wednesday via web conference.

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Brian Whitehead | Reporter

Brian Whitehead is a reporter for The San Bernardino Sun, covering Colton, Fontana, Grand Terrace, Rialto and San Bernardino. He previously covered prep sports and the cities of Buena Park, Fullerton and La Palma for The Orange County Register. A Grand Terrace native and Riverside Notre Dame alumnus, he earned his journalism degree from Cal State Fullerton in 2010. Since joining The Sun in late 2017, he has reported on development, education, homelessness, marijuana, political strife and the myriad issues facing San Bernardino post-bankruptcy.

bwhitehead@scng.com

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County firefighters were joined by firefighters from the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in battling this fire that was reported a little after midnight Sunday, Feb. 28.

Explosion rocks home during fire fight

Mar 01, 2021 2:58 PM

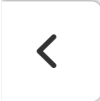
TWENTYNINE PALMS —The sound of an explosion punctuated a late night, early morning firefight at a home in the 6400 block of Cholla Avenue here Sunday, Feb. 28.

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County fire crews were dispatched to reports of a structure fire at 12:42 a.m. Neighbors said a house never to theirs was on fire.

According to information from the Morongo Basin sheriff’s station, the fire began in a vacant duplex and jumped to a neighboring duplex, forced residents there to be evacuated.



The home was on fire upon arrival and the fire extended to an attic of an adjacent home, but was quickly knocked down,” McClintock explained. “The fire in the original building appeared to displace no one, one adult was displaced in the adjacent occupancy. He didn’t need Red Cross as he arranged for staying with someone.”

Firefighters from station 44 in downtown Twentynine Palms arrived in four minutes and four heavy smoke and fire showing from the home. They heard a large explosion during their initial attack.

Crews used a transitional fire attack, working to knock the fire down then enter the home to complete a search and overhaul.

The fire was knocked down in approximately 30 minutes. San Bernardino County Fire responded with three engines, a Battalion Chief and a Fire Investigator. Combat Center Fire assisted with an Engine.

The fire is under investigation by fire investigators.





Watch



News

By **Jake Ingrassia**

March 1, 2021 10:55 pm Published [March 1, 2021 7:17 pm](#)

Police warn of homeless people, inmates being brought to quarantine in Palm Springs

Police warn of homeless people, inmates being brought to quarantine in Pal...

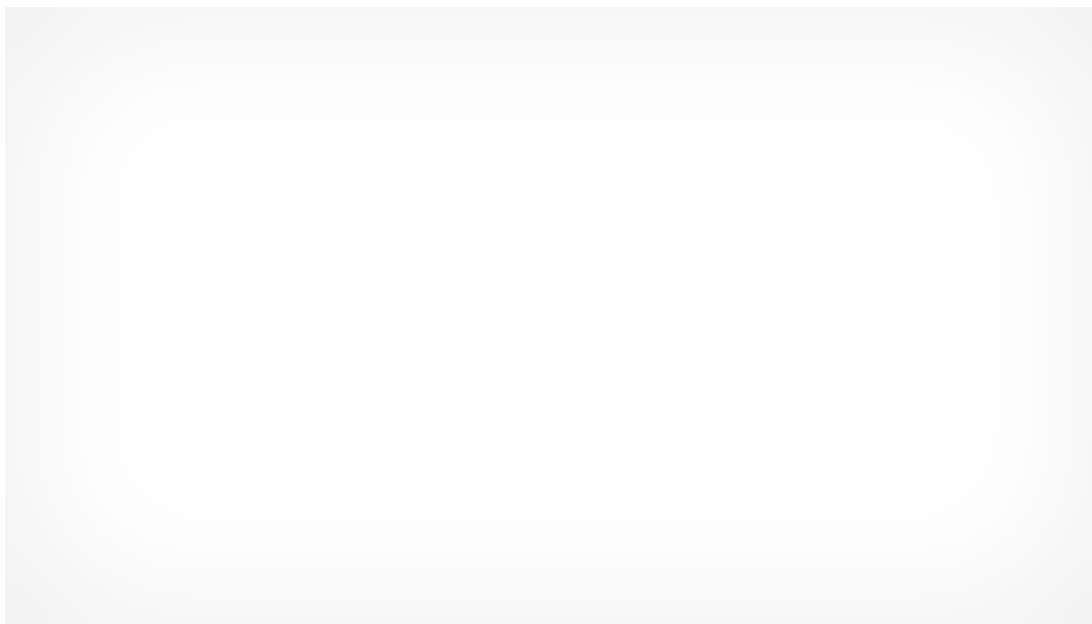


Police in Palm Springs are warning that dozens of homeless people and some inmates are being brought into the city and released.

County officials said the people are brought here to quarantine or isolate as part of a county-funded public health program. But city leaders are upset they had no idea it was happening.

Last week, officers discovered about 30 people had been bused in from outside the Coachella Valley, PSPD Chief Bryan Reyes told city council. "Who knows how many have been coming into our city," Reyes said. "It's a little disturbing."

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Some of them were inmates being released from the county jail in Banning, Reyes said. They were arrested outside the valley, in western parts of Riverside County like Riverside, Corona and Jurupa Valley, served their sentence, then were brought to Palm Springs.

At least one person was re-arrested by PSPD.

The program, which is part of the county's Department of Infectious Diseases, aims to help at-risk homeless people quarantine for about a week in an unidentified Palm Springs hotel. Then, they're released into the city.



Watch



No notice of the program was sent from the county to the city or police. Reyes said officers learned about it from the individuals themselves.

"We've made attempts to contact the program manager to get some answers, to understand, to partner," he said.

City council appeared furious that they weren't warned, and aren't getting resources from the county to help.

"This cannot continue like this and it's really unacceptable to our city, our residents, our businesses that this is happening," said Councilmember Geoff Kors.

"We have a very, very large number of extremely angry residents and merchants," said Mayor Pro-Tem Lisa Middleton. "We've now learned they have reason to be angry."

"We should not be a dumping ground for the entire county in this type of program, especially without partnership of our police chief," said Mayor Christy Holstege.

In a statement to News Channel 3, a Riverside County spokeswoman said the public health program has been in place since 2004, most often helping people discharged from the hospital.

She said efforts are made to place people close to where they live.

City leaders are now calling for answers and immediate reform, pushing for a high-priority meeting with Supervisor Perez and planning to take action at their meeting this week.

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Bicyclist from Cherry Valley slain in San Bernardino shooting

By **RUBY GONZALES** | rugonzales@scng.com | San Gabriel Valley Tribune

PUBLISHED: March 2, 2021 at 10:08 a.m. | UPDATED: March 2, 2021 at 10:09 a.m.

Authorities identified the bicyclist killed in a shooting Friday night, Feb. 26, in San Bernardino as Anthony Garcia, 29, of Cherry Valley.

He was in the 1200 block of West Eighth Street when a driver pulled up and opened fire, San Bernardino Sgt. John Echevarria said. Garcia was shot multiple times.

The shooter then drove off.

Detectives didn't yet know the motive behind the shooting, reported to police at 9:10 p.m.

San Bernardino police asked that anyone with information about the shooting to call 909-384-5628.

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New Orleans Archdiocese warns Catholics to avoid ‘morally compromised’ Johnson & Johnson vaccine

By **Jaclyn Peiser**

March 2, 2021 at 2:24 a.m. PST



On Friday, as a Food and Drug Administration expert panel recommended approving the Johnson & Johnson coronavirus vaccine, the Archdiocese of New Orleans offered a differing opinion. Taking the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the Archdiocese said, would be immoral.

“The archdiocese must instruct Catholics that the latest vaccine from Janssen/Johnson & Johnson is morally compromised as it uses the abortion-derived cell line in development and production of the vaccine as well as the testing,” the Archdiocese of New Orleans said in a statement on Friday.

The decision could put the archdiocese in conflict with the Vatican and Pope Francis, who have been aggressively pro-vaccine. Last December, the Vatican approved the use of vaccines “that have used cell lines from aborted fetuses in their research and production process,” adding it’s “morally acceptable,” although the pope has yet to specifically address the Johnson & Johnson shot.

As some houses of worship host vaccination centers, the advice could affect distribution efforts in New Orleans and drive people away from the single-dose vaccine as health officials urge Americans to take whichever doses are available.

“If you go to a place and you have J&J, and that’s the one that’s available now, I would take it,” Anthony S. Fauci, the nation’s top infectious-disease doctor, said on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” “I think people need to get vaccinated as quickly and as expeditiously as possible.”

There is a long-standing debate in the Catholic Church over accepting vaccines and treatments that use fetal tissue, centering on HEK293 cells, which are cloned from an aborted fetus from the early 1970s, according to Religion News Service. The cells used now, such as those used in the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, are not from the original fetal tissue.

In the case of the coronavirus vaccines, the Vatican said they “can be used in good conscience” given the severity of the pandemic and since the vaccine’s connection to the original abortion is remote. Pope Francis took the Pfizer vaccine, and last month the governor of Vatican City said employees who don’t take a vaccine could be sanctioned or fired.

While the Archdiocese of New Orleans said it agreed with the Vatican’s approval of the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines

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of New Orleans disagreed.

“We advise that if the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine is available, Catholics should choose to receive either of those vaccines rather than to receive the new Johnson & Johnson vaccine because of its extensive use of abortion-derived cell lines,” the statement says.

A Vatican spokesperson did not immediately respond to a message from The Washington Post late on Monday about the New Orleans ruling.

Some Catholic clergy have gone further. Bishop Joseph E. Strickland in Tyler, Tex., has tweeted repeatedly that Catholics should not take any of the three vaccines.

“The fact remains that ANY vaccine available today involves using murdered children before they could even be born,” he tweeted in January. “I renew my pledge ... I will not extend my life by USING murdered children. This is evil WAKE UP!”

Fetal tissue from abortions has been essential to scientific research for decades. Researchers have used it to help find treatments for a wide range of illnesses, including Ebola and cancer. It has also been crucial for studying the immune system.

The treatment Donald Trump used when he contracted covid-19 was tested using human cells. Trump endorsed its use, despite suspending federal funding for similar scientific research in 2019.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine offers a strategic advantage to a vaccine rollout as demand continues to outweigh supply. Not only does the one-shot dose allow for quicker and more widespread inoculations, it can be stored in a regular refrigerator for months.

So far, Louisiana has administered nearly 690,000 first doses of coronavirus vaccines, covering almost 15 percent of the state’s population. More than 385,000 people have been fully vaccinated in the state, according to The Posts’s vaccine tracker.

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