



Agenda

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 ECONOMIC IMPACT AND RECOVERY

May 28, 2020

**** Note earlier start time: 1:00 P.M.**

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://atttrials.zoom.us/j/98599450043>

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Supervisor Candace Andersen, Chair
Supervisor Karen Mitchoff, Vice Chair

Agenda Items:

Items may be taken out of order based on the business of the day and preference of the Committee

1. Introductions
2. Public comment on any item under the jurisdiction of the Committee and not on this agenda (speakers may be limited to two minutes).
3. RECEIVE and APPROVE the Record of Action for the May 21, 2020 meeting.
4. CONSIDER the impacts of COVID-19 on religious gatherings and discuss pathways that may allow them to resume, if possible, within the limitations established by the County Health Officer.
5. The next meeting is currently scheduled for June 4, 2020.
6. Adjourn

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Public comment may be submitted via electronic mail on agenda items at least one full work day prior to the published meeting time.

For Additional Information Contact:

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Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors

Subcommittee Report

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 ECONOMIC IMPACT AND RECOVERY

Meeting Date: 05/28/2020

Subject: RECORD OF ACTION FOR MAY 21, 2020 MEETING

Submitted For: David Twa, County Administrator

Department: County Administrator

Referral No.:

Referral Name:

Presenter: Julie DiMaggio Enea

Contact: Julie DiMaggio Enea
(925) 335-1077

Referral History:

County Ordinance requires that each County body keep a record of its meetings. Though the record need not be verbatim, it must accurately reflect the agenda and the decisions made in the meeting.

Referral Update:

Attached is the draft Record of Action for the May 21, 2020 meeting.

Recommendation(s)/Next Step(s):

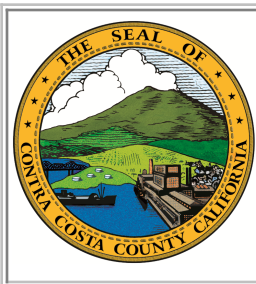
RECEIVE and APPROVE the Record of Action for the May 21, 2020 meeting.

Fiscal Impact (if any):

No fiscal impact.

Attachments

DRAFT Record of Action for the May 21, 2020 Meeting



AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 ECONOMIC IMPACTS AND RECOVERY

RECORD OF ACTION FOR
May 21, 2020

Supervisor Candace Andersen, Chair
Supervisor Karen Mitchoff, Vice Chair

Present: Candace Andersen, Chair
Karen Mitchoff, Vice Chair

Staff Present: Dr. Chris Farnitano, County Health Officer
Julie DiMaggio Enea, Senior Deputy County Administrator

1. Introductions

Chair Andersen called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m.

2. Public comment on any item under the jurisdiction of the Committee and not on this agenda (speakers may be limited to three minutes).

No one requested to speak during the general public comment period.

3. RECEIVE and APPROVE the partial Record of Action for the May 14, 2020 meeting.

No action was taken on the partial record of action for the prior meeting.

4. CONSIDER the impacts of COVID-19 on the following business sectors and discuss pathways that may allow these business to resume, if possible, within the limitations established by the County Health Officer:

1. Recreation/Lifestyle Services

- a. Health Clubs/Gyms
- b. Camping/RV Parks
- c. Swimming Schools
- d. Municipal Parks and Recreation Programs

2. Curbside Retail and Associated Warehousing / Manufacturing

Chair Andersen asked Dr. Farnitano to address some questions that she and Supervisor Mitchoff had received during the previous week. She asked about private sports clubs and private neighborhood pools, and why the health order is not allowing adult lap swimming and when we might see it being allowed.

Dr. Farnitano explained that the State health order does not currently permit

community pools outside of a family backyard pool. The County health order cannot be less restrictive than the State order. Until the State lifts this restriction, the only public pool exception is for children's day camps that are specifically structured to comply with State and County guidelines.

Chair Andersen next asked about children's swimming lessons and described how many people feel such lessons are a health and safety necessity, especially with summer months approaching. She asked when swim lessons might be allowed and if some dedicated swim camps could be permitted.

Dr. Farnitano explained that swimming lessons could be provided in a structured children's day camp setting as previously described. However, the State order does not currently permit swim lessons outside of the camp setting.

Chair Andersen suggested that many recreational activities could be administered using the same model as the children's day camp, such as a sports league with training classes. She asked if a sports league could operate if it complied with the 12:1 stable group to stable adult ratio.

Dr. Farnitano clarified that the activity could only be permitted for children of working adults in a setting where the same adult is supervising the same group of children for the entire duration of the camp, rather than changing week to week. While there are no minimum requirements for the duration of a camp, the objective is to not expose adults or the kids to different people, in order to minimize risk of transmission of the virus.

Chair Andersen asked how the health order is being enforced.

Dr. Farnitano explained that the health department is not certifying operating plans. Each business is responsible for reading and complying with the legal requirements of the health order. The health officer can assist with interpreting the health orders, as is being done in this meeting.

Chair Andersen provided an update of the County's virus statistics, noting that three more deaths have occurred, and more cases have been identified.

Dr. Farnitano noted that with additional testing, the County had seen a 4% jump this week and that neighboring Alameda County's cases have increased significantly, so caution is still required to prevent another surge.

Chair Andersen asked, in response to people who want to see the State and County jump ahead to Phase 2, how much time is needed to assess the impact of the loosened restrictions.

Dr. Farnitano responded that at least a couple of weeks are needed and probably somewhat more to study the effect of a change in restrictions due to the lengthy incubation period of the virus.

Chair Andersen moved on to discuss the importance of business and community activities to begin planning how they can meet health guidelines once the State and

County eventually move fully to Phase 2 and then 3. She asked how they might best provide input into how their businesses can resume operations in compliance with the health order.

Dr. Farnitano said that input to the health officer and to Sacramento (legislators) would be helpful towards incorporating ideas into the ultimate plan and to achieve better consistency across the state. He said that the Bay Area is like one big ecosystem and must cooperate for the best outcome. He discussed the five indicators used by the health officers to determine direction. He said that testing had been ramped up as well as contact tracing to interrupt the spread. Very few hospitals have certified that they have access to PPE (person protective equipment) sufficient to meet their needs. There are many metrics that must be considered. He opined that counties that have chosen to disregard the health orders are taking big risks and any consequences won't be known for weeks.

Chair Andersen asked Dr. Farnitano to speak to the weighing of loss of life metrics with the loss of economic productivity and the loss of livelihoods, and the mental and physical toll of the SIP (shelter in place) rules.

Dr. Farnitano agreed that we need to find the balance but didn't attribute all of the economic downturn to the pandemic. Towards finding that balance, the health orders have been loosened somewhat, but even if all business could fully resume, he said people won't patronize them if they don't feel safe.

Vice Chair Mitchoff commented that it's difficult to respond to the frustration vented by people who want the economic recovery to proceed faster because we cannot know what the impact would have been if we had been less restrictive sooner. How many more deaths might have occurred had we been less cautious? She said that she hears concerns about both the tight restrictions and, on the flip side, fears about the health risks of loosening them.

Chair Andersen opened the public comment period for issues pertinent to recreation, curbside retail, and associated warehousing / manufacturing. The following individuals commented:

- Michael Wiseman commented about contradictions between operating rules for stores like Home Depot vs. his own hair salons, and how fear of the virus has had a more devastating effect than the virus itself.*
- Michelle Lacy asked how frequently childcare workers should be tested, to which Dr. Farnitano advised at least monthly for people who work with high-risk individuals or in high-contact activities.*
- Stan Gibson questioned the constitutionality of the health orders and the validity of the health data, to which Vice Chair Mitchoff responded that under the police powers of the State Constitution, the health officer does have the authority to state what he has stated. She advised that we are legally obligated to follow the orders of the health officer.*
- Eli Friedman commented on the negative impact of the health orders on the economy and questioned whether the quarantine is saving lives.*
- Jerry Thomsen commented about churches that are disobeying the health order and asked for guidance about how to provide counsel and encouragement to*

people without violating the health order, to which Chair Andersen noted that religious services would be a topic on the next meeting agenda.

- *Susan Morgan commented about the need for a better balance between health safety and economic viability, and asked the Board of Supervisors to take a more active role in finding that balance.*
- *Elizabeth Bowles asked about salons and how rules will be applied, and observed that salons vary greatly in size and their ability to socially distance.*
- *Jen Juroff asked why we are not meeting the daily testing goal of 2,200 tests.*
- *Vicki commented that the health order directives don't seem responsive to the current situation and that the economy should not be effectively shut down over what she characterized as an unattainable metric.*

•
Chair Andersen clarified the sequence of health orders as they applied to senior care facilities.

- *Mike McDermott asked for guidance on setting up a vehicle-based church gathering.*
- *Loren Burns asked on what date guidelines might be published for businesses to plan for reopening.*
- *Wendy Dahlstrom commented that most of the reported deaths were of people aged over 80 with underlying health conditions and that children need to get back to school. She complained that people's rights are being violated.*
- *Shannon Friedman commented about negative effect the SIP order on people's emotional and psychological wellbeing.*
- *Betty McNely commented that we've taken enough time in Phase 2 and need to move to Phase 3 and that her own business may now be in jeopardy.*
- *Christine commented about what she perceives to be contradictions in rules about patronizing grocery stores vs. other retail stores. She was concerned that the County isn't recovering quickly enough economically and cited Napa County's more liberal interpretation of the State order.*

Dr. Farnitano then discussed in some detail:

- *antibody testing and its accuracy*
- *ways of providing church services in compliance with the order, specifically virtual communication*
- *his expectation that the State will eventually distribute guidelines for personal care businesses such as salons*
- *the goal of 2,200 tests daily*
- *the importance of facial coverings in mitigating the spread of the virus*
- *why shelter in place is only effective when practiced by all, not just the most at risk*
- *the importance of human interaction to wellbeing*

Chair Andersen moved to the topic of recreational and lifestyle services, as a continuation of the prior week's discussion.

- *Liz Claytor commented about swim lessons and how they don't seem to have been considered under the State order, to which Dr. Farnitano reiterated the State's rules pertaining to child day camps. Discussion ensued about whether San Mateo County's interpretation was in violation of the State order and how inconsistencies between counties causes problems. Chair Andersen*

recommended that Ms. Claytor contact Senator Glazer's office or Assemblyman Grayson's office. Vice Chair Mitchoff said it was important to report violators of the health order.

- Framework Fitness commented that people are eager and anxious to return to patronizing local businesses. She suggested that the County proactively propose industry guidelines to the State. She contrasted studio fitness centers and gyms.*
- Clayton Loosli commented that it is a mistake to prohibit group swim lessons for children, and that a more practical solution is needed to help people continue with their lives.*

Chair Andersen emphasized that the health officer relies on a way array of expertise in the medical field and coordinates with Bay Area health officers. He is not making decisions for Contra Costa County in a vacuum.

- Jeanann asked when the 12:1 ratio for children's camps might be increased and by what duration will the County continue to trail behind the State recovery plan, to which Dr. Farnitano reiterated that counties may be ahead or trail behind the State's recovery pace based on local health statistics and the population density. The Bay Area is trailing behind the State's pace by a couple of weeks and sufficient time must be allowed to study the effects of changed standards. He could not give hard timelines but said that if the County's indicators are moving in the right direction, we can probably advance further into Phase 2. As to the 12:1 ratio, we must observe the State order.*
- Garrett Shelley requested clarification on team swim camp requirements because people hold differing interpretations.*
- Ann Mason also commented on adult lap swim, to which Chair Andersen reiterated that adult lap swim is not currently authorized under the State order, only childcare day camps for children of working parents.*

Vice Chair Mitchoff reiterated the importance of reporting people who do not observe the health order in order to preserve a level playing field. There followed some discussion about an allegation that Roundhill Country Club was advertising adult lap swimming. Dr. Farnitano agreed to follow up on that claim.

Vice Chair Mitchoff then discussed the seriousness of the virus and how it is unlike other flus and causes not just deaths but agonizing deaths. She mentioned some businesses who claimed they had certification to operate from the County health officer, but the health officer makes no such certifications.

- Hillary clarified that Roundhill Country Club is not allowing adult lap swimming and has not yet started children's camps. The letter that was sent to the County was a draft proposal and not something being currently done. The letter should have been prefaced by a transmittal email that was not included in the meeting record.*

Chair Mitchoff asked staff to add the transmitting email to the record and explained that correspondence was being sent to staff via multiple channels.

Chair Andersen moved onto the curbside retail and warehousing/manufacturing business sectors and mentioned the FAQs on the County's website.

- *Nicole K. asked for guidance about how to resume thrift shop operations safely, once permitted, and what it would look like for their 65 and older volunteers.*

Dr. Farnitano clarified that nothing in the health order precludes the acceptance of donations. He recommended setting up processes that maintain social distancing, wiping down hard surfaces, and letting items sit in a temporary space before anyone handles them if they cannot be easily wiped down. He suggested also examining ways to mimic current protocols around essential retail like supermarkets in preparation for the time when thrift stores can reopen.

Chair Andersen commented that people who are sheltering in place are reorganizing closets and households and need to know that donations can be accepted and where to donate. She asked for this information to be added to the County's FAQs.

5. The next meeting is currently scheduled for May 28, 2020.

The start time of the May 28th meeting was changed from 1:30 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

6. Adjourn

Chair Andersen thanked everyone who participated in the meeting and said we can find wisdom in the Constitution that appoints a health officer to make these decisions rather than relying on politics. She thanked Vice Chair Mitchoff and Dr. Farnitano and announced that the next meeting would focus on religious gatherings.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

For Additional Information Contact:

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Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors

Subcommittee Report

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 ECONOMIC IMPACT AND RECOVERY

Meeting Date: 05/28/2020
Subject: COVID-19 Recovery Road Map for Personal Services
Businesses and Recreation/Lifestyle Services
Submitted For: David Twa, County Administrator
Department: County Administrator
Referral No.:
Referral Name:
Presenter: **Contact:**

Referral History:

Although the Board of Supervisors has authority over County issues, under State law, when an emergency of this nature is declared and there is a pandemic of this magnitude, the Health Officer of each County has the legal authority to impose whatever orders she or he deem necessary to protect the public.

On Tuesday, April 21, the Board of Supervisors formed this ad hoc committee to advise the Health Department on COVID19 impacts. The goal of the committee is to work toward having a sustainable COVID-19 mitigation and recovery plan. The committee will be working with the community and industry on issues of concern, advising the Board of Supervisors and the Health Officer on possible ways to interpret and apply Health Orders so they will continue to keep the community safe, but allow more businesses to re-open and provide common-sense applications to outdoor activities.

The Committee conducted public meetings on May 7, 14, and 21, 2020 covering recreation and lifestyle services, in-home and other personal services, small businesses. A record of those meetings is posted on the County website at this [link](#). The committee plans to continue meeting weekly, taking up issues related to different business/community sectors at each meeting. The Committee previously identified eight sectors to focus on over the course of the next several meetings:

1. Faith organizations
2. Recreation and Lifestyle
3. Restaurant
4. In-home and other personal services
5. RV/Park
6. Small businesses
7. Thrift sales & collection
8. Furniture

Referral Update:

Relevant Excerpts From the California Corona Virus Response Website:

Californians have been staying home and saving lives since the start of the statewide stay-at-home order issued on March 19, 2020. These efforts have allowed the state to move forward on its [roadmap](#) for modifying the statewide order.

STAGE 1: Safety and preparedness

Make workplaces safe for our essential workers.

STAGE 2: Lower-risk workplaces

Gradually reopen retail (curbside only), manufacturing & logistics. Later, relax retail restrictions, adapt & reopen schools, child care, offices & limited hospitality, personal services.

STAGE 3: Higher-risk workplaces

Adapt and reopen movie theaters, religious services, & more personal & hospitality services.

STAGE 4: End of Stay Home Order

Reopen areas of highest risk: e.g. Concerts, conventions, sports arenas.

When modifications are advanced and the state's [six indicators](#) show we've made enough progress, we can move to the next stage of the roadmap. Stage 2 expansion will be phased in gradually. Some communities may move through Stage 2 faster if they are able to show greater progress. Counties that have met the readiness criteria and worked with the California Department of Public Health can open more workplaces as outlined on the [County Variance page](#).

Industry guidance to reduce the risk

California will move into Stage 2 of modifying the state's Stay-at-Home order on May 8, 2020. Our progress in achieving key [public health metrics](#) will allow a gradual re-opening of California's economy. We recognize the impact of economic hardship. We must get our economy roaring once again and put paychecks in people's pockets. But the risk of COVID-19 infection is still real for all Californians and continues to be fatal. That is why every business should take every step humanly possible to reduce the risk of infection:

- Plan and prepare for re-opening
- Make radical changes within the workplace
- Adjust practices by employees and help educate customers

Below are [guidance](#) for each early Stage 2 business to follow. The goal is a safe, clean environment for workers and customers. Businesses may use effective alternative or innovative methods to build upon the guidance. Review the guidance that is relevant to your workplace, prepare a plan based on the guidance for your industry, and put it into action. When complete, you can post the industry-specific checklist (below) in your workplace to show your customers and your employees that you've reduced the risk and are open for business. Before reopening, all facilities must:

1. Perform a detailed risk assessment and implement a site-specific protection plan
2. Train employees on how to limit the spread of COVID-19, including how to [screen themselves for symptoms](#) and stay home if they have them
3. Implement individual control measures and screenings
4. Implement disinfecting protocols
5. Implement physical distancing guidelines

It is critical that employees needing to self-isolate because of COVID-19 are encouraged to stay at home, with sick

leave policies to support that, to prevent further infection in your workplace. See additional information on [government programs supporting sick leave and worker's compensation for COVID-19](#).

The State describes high-risk workplaces/venues to include:

- Personal services such as nail salons, tattoo parlors, gyms and fitness studios
- Hospitality services, such as bars and lounges
- Entertainment venues, such as movie theaters, gaming facilities, and pro sports
- Indoor museums, kids museums and gallery spaces, zoos, and libraries
- Community centers, including public pools, playgrounds, and picnic areas
- Religious services and cultural ceremonies
- Nightclubs
- Concert venues
- Festivals
- Theme parks
- Hotels/lodging for leisure and tourism

Out-of-home personal services such as salons, and recreation and community facilities are generally categorized by the State as high-risk workplaces/venues, which could re-open with limitations at Stage 3 of the State's recovery road map.

It is unclear how at-home personal services are categorized and their category may depend on whether or not social distancing can be maintained and how much personal contact is required.

Community centers, public swimming facilities, picnic areas are included in the State's high-risk category and would not be permitted during Stage 2 of the recovery.

Recommendation(s)/Next Step(s):

CONSIDER the impacts of COVID-19 on religious gatherings and discuss pathways that may allow them to resume, if possible, within the limitations established by the County Health Officer.

Fiscal Impact (if any):

No fiscal impact. The Committee's meetings facilitate the exchange of information and ideas.

Attachments

[Update-on-California-Pandemic-Roadmap](#)

[News Article SF Chronicle 5-22-2020](#)

[New Article LA Times 5-22-2020](#)

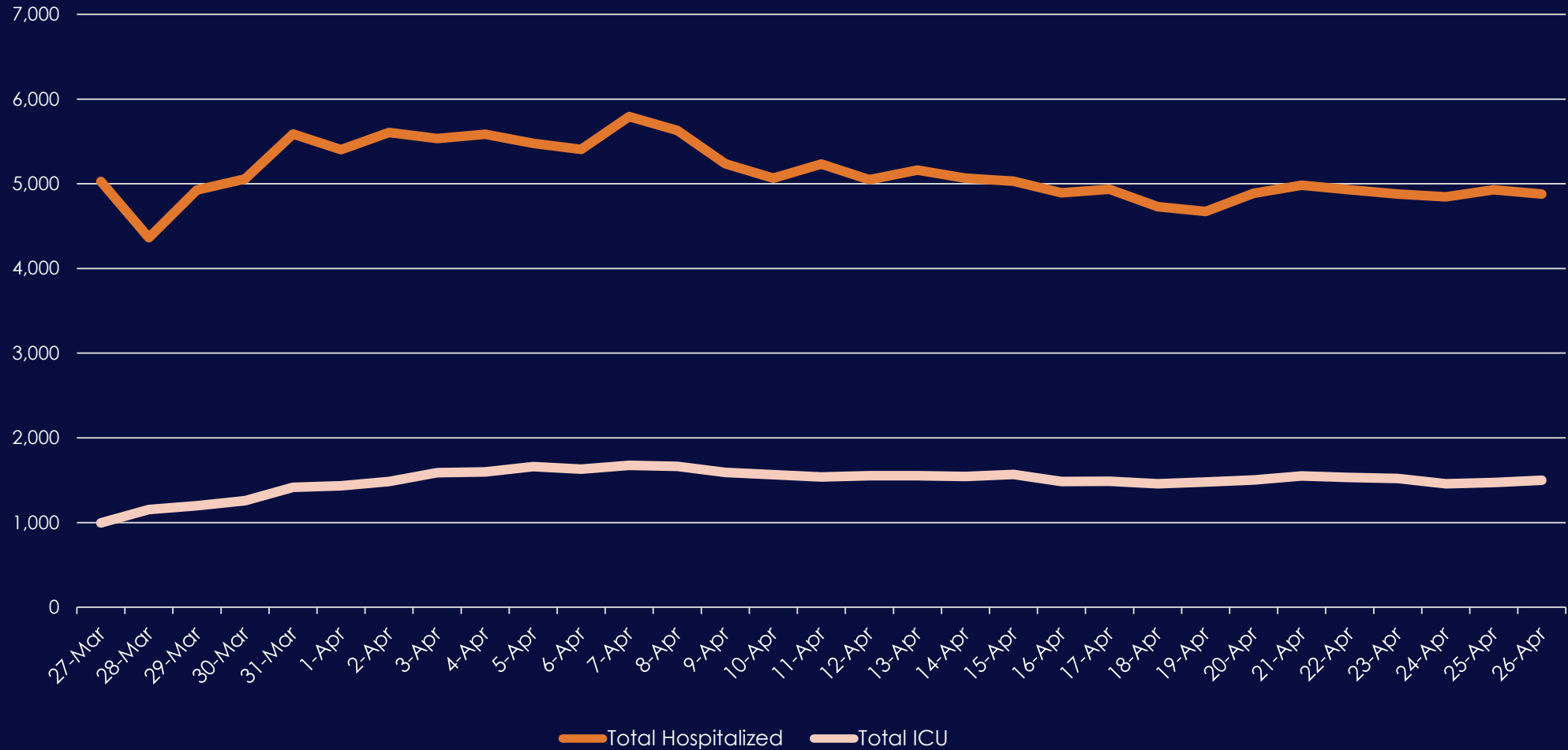


Update on California's Pandemic Roadmap

6 Indicators for Modifying Stay-at-Home Order

- Ability to test, contact trace, isolate, and support the exposed
- Ability to protect those at high risk for COVID-19
- Surge capacity for hospital and health systems
- Therapeutic development to meet the demand
- Ability of businesses, schools, and childcare facilities to support physical distancing
- Determination of when to reinstitute measures like Stay-At-Home

California Hospitalization Trend Lines



Total includes both COVID-19 confirmed positive hospitalizations as well as COVID-19 suspect hospitalizations.

The Basics



COVID-19 is not going away soon.



Modifications to Stay-At-Home Order must be guided by health risk and a commitment to equity.



Taking responsibility is key at all levels – individual, business, and government.

Resilience Roadmap Stages

STAGE 1: Safety and Preparedness

Making essential workforce environment as safe as possible.

STAGE 2: Lower Risk Workplaces

Creating opportunities for lower risk sectors to adapt and re-open.

Modified school programs and childcare re-open.

STAGE 3: Higher Risk Workplaces

Creating opportunities for higher risk sectors to adapt and re-open.

STAGE 4: End of Stay-At-Home Order

Return to expanded workforce in highest risk workplaces.

Requires
Therapeutics.

Stage 1: Safety and Preparedness

This is where we are now.

- **Continue to build out testing, contact tracing, PPE, and hospital surge capacity.**
- **Continue to make essential workplaces as safe as possible.**
 - Physical and work flow adaption
 - Essential workforce safety net
 - Make PPE more widely available
 - Individual behavior changes
- **Prepare sector-by-sector safety guidelines for expanded workforce.**

Stage 2: Lower Risk Workplaces

Gradually opening some lower risk workplaces with ADAPTATIONS:

- Retail (e.g. curbside pickup)
- Manufacturing
- Offices (when telework not possible)
- Opening more public spaces

Expanded Workforce Safety Net:

- Wage replacement so workers can stay home when sick

Stage 2: Lower Risk Workplaces

Schools and Childcare Facilities with Adaptations:

- Summer programs and next school year potentially starting sooner (July/August)
- Childcare facilities to provide more care
- Address learning gaps
- Ensure students and staff are protected
- Allow broader workforce to return to work

Actions needed to get from Stage 1 to Stage 2



Government Actions

- Policies that allow people to stay home when they're sick
- Guidance provided on how to reduce risk



Business Actions

- Wage replacement so workers can stay home when sick
- Implement adaptations to lower-risk workplaces NOW
- Employees continue to work from home when possible



Individual Actions

- Safety precautions – physical distancing, face coverings, etc.
- Avoid all non-essential travel
- Support and care for people who are at high risk

When are we ready for Stage 2?

Key indicator considerations to move to Stage 2:

- Hospitalization and ICU trends stable.
- Hospital surge capacity to meet demand.
- Sufficient PPE supply to meet demand.
- Sufficient testing capacity to meet demand.
- Contact tracing capacity statewide.

Transition to Stage 2 will occur through a statewide modification to the Stay-At-Home Order.

Opportunity for Regional Variations

During Stage 2, counties may choose to relax stricter local orders at their own pace.

Following Stage 2, once a statewide COVID-19 surveillance system is made possible through testing, further regional variations could be supported.

State will consult and collaborate closely with local governments.

Stage 3: Higher Risk Workplaces

Open higher risk environments with adaptations and limits on size of gatherings:

- Personal care (hair and nail salons, gyms)
- Entertainment venues (movie theaters, sports without live audiences)
- In-person religious services (churches, weddings)

Stage 4: End of Stay-At-Home Order

Re-open highest risk workplaces with all indicators satisfied once therapeutics have been developed:

- Concerts
- Convention Centers
- Live audience sports

Be Part of the Solution

Stay Home. Practice Physical Distancing.

We are enlisting all Californians to help inform the development of guidance for sectors across our economy.

This guidance will provide a framework for how to safely re-open.

CALIFORNIA

ALL

**Your Actions
Save Lives**

covid19.ca.gov

POLITICS

California to issue reopening rules for religious gatherings by Monday

Alexei Koseff | May 22, 2020 | Updated: May 22, 2020 6:14 p.m.



Lisa Reece (left) and Deacon Robert Lacy (center) during the virtual church service at Cornerstone Missionary Church in the Bayview district on Sunday, May 10, 2020 in San Francisco, California. One of the congregants, Tessie Henry, contracted coronavirus from a funeral at the church and later died.

Photo: Gabrielle Lurie / The Chronicle

SACRAMENTO — California will issue coronavirus safety guidelines for religious gatherings by Monday, Gov. Gavin Newsom said hours after President Trump declared houses of worship “essential” and called on states to allow them to reopen this weekend.

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groups have not yet been granted permission to accept congregants back for worship.

Religious services are still prohibited in California this weekend, part of a broader limitation on mass gatherings during the coronavirus pandemic. Newsom indicated Friday that a blanket ban for in-person worship might be eased soon, though he did not specify when.

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“We deeply respect and admire the faith, the devotion and the cause that unites millions and millions of Californians,” Newsom said at a news conference in Yountville. “At a time of so much anxiety and uncertainty, faith and that devotion to something higher, better and bigger than yourself becomes even more pronounced and more profound and more important.”

The governor has expressed concern about the potential spread of the virus among “congregations of people mixing from far and wide, coming together proximate in closed space at large scales.”

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BY LAUREN HERNÁNDEZ

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US & WORLD

BY TATIANA SANCHEZ

Churchgoer exposes 180 at service that reportedly violated...

Butte County officials said last week that more than 180 people were exposed to the coronavirus after they attended an unauthorized Mother's Day church service with an asymptomatic carrier. An early outbreak in Sacramento County was linked to fellowship meetings held by dozens of members of a church.

Even as many counties have received permission to start welcoming diners back to restaurants and shoppers back to stores, churches, mosques, synagogues and other places of worship are barred from holding services. Earlier this week, Newsom said it could be several weeks before the ban is lifted.

But California is under increasing pressure to let services resume. While federal courts have blocked several lawsuits seeking to end the ban immediately, the U.S. Justice Department warned the state this week that its policy amounted to religious discrimination and it must ease restrictions to enable services to take place with proper safety

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A group of Christian pastors, known as Church United, has also promised to defy Newsom to hold services on May 31, the feast of the Pentecost. The group said it expects thousands of churches across the state to join.

Trump ramped up the stakes Friday when he told reporters that he was declaring religious institutions as “essential places that provide essential services.”

He said he would “override” any governors who did not abide by his request to let houses of worship reopen. The White House did not explain what authority Trump would invoke to issue any such order.

“Some governors have deemed liquor stores and abortion clinics as essential,” but not churches, Trump said. “It’s not right. So I’m correcting this injustice and calling houses of worship essential.”

At his news conference, Newsom gave no indication when religious services could actually resume.

“We’ve been engaging the faith community. We look forward to churches reopening in a safe and responsible manner,” Newsom said.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released new guidelines for religious institutions Friday that include taking steps to limit the size of gatherings and considering holding services outdoors or in large, well-ventilated areas.

Newsom said he would review those recommendations as the state

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people’s health and their fundamental need and desire to practice their faith.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Alexei Koseff is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. Email: alexei.koseff@sfchronicle.com Twitter: [@akoseff](https://twitter.com/akoseff)

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Newsom promises reopening plan for churches as Trump demands immediate action



Protesters call for the reopening of churches in Huntington Beach on May 9. (Raul Roa / Los Angeles Times)

By Raul Roa, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

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Gov. Gavin Newsom vowed to provide plans Monday for reopening California churches amid mounting pressure to allow in-person religious services both from protesters and President Trump, who is demanding that governors take action immediately.

Newsom's comment comes just days after he said opening churches to congregants was "a few weeks away." The governor said he has been meeting with religious leaders for weeks to craft a plan for the safe reopening of churches for services, including efforts to sanitize pews, ensure safe distancing and other safety protocols.

"We look forward to churches reopening in a safe and responsible manner, and we have guidelines that we anticipated completing on Monday and we're on track to do just that," Newsom said during a COVID-19 briefing held at the Veterans Home of California in Yountville on Friday.

Newsom's comments came hours after Trump made an unexpected appearance in the White House briefing room to declare that he was designating churches "essential" businesses so that they can immediately reopen.

Trump, who has said he would leave decisions about easing public health guidance to states but has often criticized decisions by individual governors, threatened that he would "override" states that didn't heed his directive. It was not clear what authority he was referring to.

His comments, in tenor and tone, made clear that the announcement was largely about signaling that he continues to fight for religious conservatives, a core element of his political base where Trump's support has eroded somewhat in recent weeks amid broader questions about his response to the pandemic.

"Some governors have deemed liquor stores and abortion clinics as essential, but have left out churches and other houses of worship," Trump said. "It's not right. So, I'm correcting this injustice and calling houses of worship essential."

Speaking to the possibility that some governors might not immediately adhere to his instructions, he suggested they reach out to him directly even though the matter, he asserted, would not be open to discussion.

"If there's any question, they're going to have to call me — but they are not going to be successful in that call," he said. "The governors need to do the right thing and allow these very important essential places of faith to open right now, this weekend."

When asked about Trump's comments, Newsom sidestepped the issue, saying his administration has been working with faith leaders to allow services to resume as quickly as can be done while protecting the public health.

"We have been very aggressive in trying to put together guidelines that will do justice to people's health and their fundamental need and desire to practice their faith," Newsom said. "We are looking forward to a very positive working relationship with faith leaders, as we ma

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Disease Control and Prevention had yet to release federal guidelines detailing how churches and other religious institutions should resume services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Newsom said CDC guidelines were expected to be released on Friday and said state health officials will review them to determine if they include safeguards that should be added to those being drafted by the state.

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Newsom emphasized his own religious upbringing in the Catholic Church, saying he had deep admiration and respect for the faith of the millions of Californians and the need for them to practice that faith. The governor said the vast majority of religious leaders across the state understand the need to protect the public health and have been working with his administration to ensure services, when the resume, will be conducted in a safe manner.

Earlier this week, the U.S. Department of Justice sent a letter to the Newsom administration warning that the state's stay-at-home order may [discriminate against religious groups and violate their constitutional rights](#). The letter accused Newsom of "unequal treatment of faith communities" in restricting their ability to gather and resume services.

"Simply put, there is no pandemic exception to the U.S. Constitution and its Bill of Rights," Eric S. Dreiband, an assistant attorney general and the head of the Justice Department's civil rights division, stated in the letter.

Shortly after that warning, more than [1,200 pastors in California vowed to hold in-person services on May 31](#), Pentecost Sunday, in defiance of the state moratorium on religious gatherings.

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Robert H. Tyler, an attorney representing a Lodi church that has challenged the governor's order in court, said pastors signed a "Declaration of Essentiality" that asserts their churches are as essential as grocery stores and hardware stores and should be allowed to reopen.

"We believe you are attempting to act in the best interests of the state," Tyler wrote to Newsom, "but the restrictions have gone too far and for too long."

Newsom, in an interview with Stephanie Ruhle of MSNBC on Thursday, said California was just a ["few weeks away from meaningful modifications that will allow just that to happen."](#)

A federal court judge in Sacramento recently issued a ruling that Newsom's stay-at-home order did not violate the constitutional rights to free assembly and religion when the Cross Culture Christian Center in Lodi was ordered to cease services.

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White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany, who took questions after the president's comments on Friday, struggled to cite any legal authority for the president to order governors to allow religious services to resume, attempting to deflect by suggesting that reporters questioning the validity of Trump's move wanted churches to remain closed.

She said the White House would "leave it to faith communities to reopen," noting the newly released CDC guidelines and acknowledging that the decision would be "up to the governors."

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