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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

California adults can get vaccine in April

People ages 50 and over eligible April 1; access to 16 and up opens April 15

Maria Sestito

Palm Springs Desert Sun USA TODAY NETWORK

California will expand COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to people age 50 and older on April 1, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced Thursday. People age 16 and older will be able to get their shots beginning April 15.

"In just a few weeks, there will be no rules, no limitations in the ability to get a vaccine," Newsom said while speaking at a vaccination site in Orange County.

He also said providers now have flexibility to vaccinate family members accompanying those who are currently eligible, regardless of age or preexisting condition.

More inside

Not sure if you're eligible for vaccine? County doctor weighs in, **2A**

Newsom said the state will continue to target underserved communities by working with labor groups to reach essential workers and letting health providers target vaccinations by ZIP code.

The rate of infection for households making less than \$40,000 per year is

84% higher than that of households with an income of \$120,000 or more, according to the governor's office.

The state's wealthiest residents have received 50% more vaccinations compared to vulnerable populations, his office said.

"Our only constraint is manufactured supply," Newsom said, a sentiment he's expressed in prior weeks. "We're well on

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'Senior Moment'



Southwest launching direct flights to Vegas in early May

Brian Blueskye Palm Springs Desert Sun USA TODAY NETWORK

The wait for flights from Palm Springs to Las Vegas is over.

Southwest Airlines announced Thursday that nonstop service from Palm Springs International Airport will begin May 9 and operate daily from Thursday to Monday before expanding in June to seven days a week. This will be the fourth destination out of Palm Springs for the airline, which currently operates flights to Denver, Phoenix and Oakland. Southwest first started flying out of the Coachella Valley last November. "A direct flight from Palm Springs to Las Vegas has been high on the wish list of our residents, tourism and hospitality partners for the last decade," Palm Springs City Manager David Ready said in a prepared statement. "We are delighted Southwest Airlines recognizes that Palm Springs and Las Vegas are two wildly popular resort destinations that should be connected." Ready didn't have specific figures on the potential economic impact of

Christopher Lloyd, left, and William Shatner in "Senior Moment." The film was shot in Palm Springs in 2017 and is being released to streaming platforms on Friday. SARA BERNSTEIN/SCREEN MEDIA

Palm Springs locations recognizable in new film

Brian Blueskye Palm Springs Desert Sun | USA TODAY NETWORK

In the beginning of the new film "Senior Moment," William Shatner drives his vintage silver Porsche through Palm Springs.

Coachella Valley viewers will have no trouble recognizing other local spots throughout the movie. Scenes also were filmed at the Mizell Center, Palm Springs Air Museum, Desert Art Center and Jensen's Finest Foods on East Palm Canyon Drive.

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Judges must weigh bail pay

The California Supreme Court ruled Thursday that judges must consider suspects' ability to pay when they set bail, essentially requiring that indigent defendants be freed unless they are deemed too dangerous to be released awaiting trial. REED SAXON/AP FILE

USA TODAY

Numbers alarm experts as US passes 30M cases

The United States passed 30 million COVID-19 cases on Wednesday, and U.S. health officials are expressing concern about the plateauing caseloads and refusing to say the nation has turned the corner on the pandemic. No other nation has as many COVID-19 cases or deaths. The U.S. leads by a large margin in deaths with upward of 545,000. **9A**

AmDocs festival returns

The American Documentary and Animation Film Festival is streaming Friday through April 4 on the app DocsNow+ for \$35.88, which includes a 12-month subscription for all films presented in the program. **3A**

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Woman pleads guilty to embezzling more than \$400K from her employer

CITY NEWS SERVICE

INDIO - A probationer who embezzled more than \$400,000 while employed at an addiction treatment center in Rancho Mirage pleaded guilty Wednesday to several felony charges and was immediately sentenced to more than six years in state prison.

Kelly Michelle Barnes, 42, entered guilty pleas in four separate criminal cases at the Larson Justice Center in Indio in a plea deal struck with the Riverside County District Attorney's Office.

Barnes was arrested last October on suspicion of embezzling money from Dr. Harry Haroutunian's addiction treatment business between September 2018 and March 2020.

Haroutunian, who has authored several books on addiction treatment, operates offices in both Rancho Mirage and Beverly Hills and has appeared on various programs, including the "Dr. Oz Show," "Dr. Drew on Call" and the "Dr. Phil" show, according to his personal website.

In one case, Barnes was charged with four felonies and three misdemeanors, but pleaded guilty to a lone felony count of embezzlement by an employee, court records show.

She also pleaded guilty to four felony identify theft counts in another case for fraudulent acts that date back to 2015. Specifics about that case were unclear. Barnes additionally had two felony cases involving various probation violations resolved as part of the plea agreement.

Barnes was sentenced to six years and four months in state prison and was given credit for 252 days served. She was also ordered to repay Haroutunian \$419,336, along with \$57,225 to an unnamed victim in the second identity theft case, prosecutors said.

A declaration in support of an arrest warrant prepared by Riverside County sheriff's Investigator Jomar Vanderhoof said Barnes forged Haroutunian's signature on several checks that were made out to her, for a total of \$419,336.

Investigators said she cashed some of the checks using her personal bank account, and transferred the money to a PayPal account associated with her husband's butane honey oil business.

Sheriff's deputies served a search warrant in March at her home, where a honey oil operation was discovered, along with unspecified evidence linking her to fraud, authorities said.

Honey oil, also known as "wax" or "hash," is a liquefied marijuana derivative. Drug lab operators use butane stoves to extract tincture from cannabis plants that can be mixed with anything and bottled.

Numerous explosions and fires have occurred throughout the Inland Empire over the last decade as a result of home-based honey oil manufacturing.

Barnes has documented felony convictions in Riverside County for forgery, embezzlement, identify theft, grand theft and theft by false pretenses, court records show.



People enjoy the sunshine in downtown Palm Springs on Feb. 19. TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN

How to get a \$10 coupon for Palm Springs stores

City News Service

A new program aimed at beefing up local spending amid the coronavirus pandemic will offer \$10 coupons for use at participating retail stores in Palm Springs, it was announced Tuesday.

The coupon program for retail stores was inspired by a similar program announced in January specifically for restaurants. The new program is a collaborative effort of the Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce, the city of Palm Springs, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians and several local businesses and organizations.

"We are happy to be joining this important initiative which supports our local retail stores," said Rob Hampton, general manager of the Palm Springs Convention Center and Bureau of Tourism. "Palm Springs is more than just a destination, it's the people that hold this community together, which is at the heart of our locals-love-locals campaign called We Are Palm Springs."

The coupons can be used repeatedly at participating retail stores, which will be posted on the chamber website. The program will remain in effect until funding runs out, chamber leaders said.

How to get a coupon

Coupons are good for purchases of \$30 or more, and can be printed and downloaded at https://pschamber.org/. Stores will then log the coupon number and be reimbursed. Coupons can be used



Windmill City Super #1 opened in October 2020 in downtown Palm Springs, one of a crop of new local businesses forging a way through during the pandemic-induced recession. **REYNALDO ROMERO/COURTESY**

multiple times.

According to the chamber website, the program aimed specifically at helping restaurants is still offering \$10 coupons for use at 28 participating eateries. The coupons must be used for take-out orders and cannot be used for third-party delivery services like Grubhub or Uber Eats.

Palm Springs businesses that want to participate in either program can call 760-325-1577.

CALIFORNIA LOTTERY

Mega Millions/Tuesday

Numbers picked	12, 23, 35, 38, 55	Meganumber 11
PICKS	WINNERS	PRIZE
5 plus mega	0	\$122 million
5 no mega	0	\$381,829
4 plus mega	3	\$6,340
4 no mega	45	\$475
3 plus mega	137	\$177
3 no mega	2,953	\$9
2 plus mega	2,814	\$9
1 plus mega	21,788	\$3
mega only	52,448	\$2
Friday's jackpot est	.m.) \$137M	

Super Lotto Plus/Wednesday		Daily Derby/Wednesday	
Numbers	10, 11, 13, 32,	1st place	11, Money
	38		Bags
Meganumbe	er 17	2nd place	09, Winning
Jackpot	\$32 million		Spirit
Numbers are picked at 7:57 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays. Match all five plus meganumber to win jackpot; various combinations for other prizes.		3rd place	02, Lucky Star
		Race time	1:48.89
		Match winners and time for top prize. Match either for other prizes.	

Daily 3/Wednesday

Night numbers 1, 2, 6

combinations for other prize

Daily 4/Wednesday

Numbers picked

.com.

Afternoon numbers 9, 0, 4

Match three in order for top prize;

Match four in order for top prize; combinations for other prizes

Lottery information: Riverside

On the Web: www.calottery-

offices: (800) 568-8379

5, 2, 9, 9

Powerball/Wednesday

Numbers	4, 9, 17, 27,	
	38	
Powerball	18	
Jackpot	\$238 million	
Niversia and and all	lis d at 7.50 a as	

Numbers are picked at 7:59 p.m Wednesdays and Saturdays Match all five plus powerball number to win jackpot; various combinations for other prizes.

Fantasy 5/Wednesday

Numbers picked 8, 14, 23,	_
25, 28	

Match all five for top prize. Match at least three for other prizes

Flights

Continued from Page 1A

the service, but said it's part of Palm Springs' "brand impact" as a tourism destination.

"We've been really focused on building our Palm Springs brand for at least 10 years with the downtown project, hotels and convention center," Ready said in an interview with The Desert Sun. "We've been very successful in quite a few other airlines coming to our airport as part of the process with expanded and new routes. I think Southwest recognized Palm Springs is a destination they want to be a part of because it's reinvigorated."

The news comes as the local economy looks to rebound after billions in financial losses due to business closures and shutdowns during the coronavirus pandemic.

Joe Wallace, CEO and chief innovation officer at the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership, estimated in January that the pandemic's economic impact region had been at least \$3 billion and as much as \$10 billion.

In response to whether the city had any input from Agua Caliente and the potential impact that the route could have on their casinos, Ready said there hadn't been any discussions.

"My belief is they have a very unique local product as all the tribes do in the area, and our goal is to drive our local tourism economy so that all of them are going to be successful," Ready said.

Jeff Grubbe, chairman of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, said the tribe is looking forward to having visitors from Vegas.

"The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians welcomes Las Vegas visitors traveling on Southwest to the Palm Springs area to enjoy all that the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation has to offer, including 60





miles of hiking trails at Tahquitz Canyon and the Indian Canyons, our Indian Canyons Golf Resort and our Agua Caliente Casinos in Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage and Cathedral City, as well as our new soon-to-be completed Agua Caliente Cultural Plaza," he said.

Last PSP to Vegas flights were in 2014

If you remember flying nonstop from PSP to Vegas, you are not wrong. United Airlines offered these flights for almost a decade but discontinued its services in the fall of 2014 due to the fact that "the route was not meeting their expectations," former PSP Executive Director Thomas Nolan previously told The Desert Sun.

The airline operated the service with a small, 30seat propeller aircraft which has mostly phased out of their fleet, Nolan said.

Southwest's upcoming nonstop flight will be one of nearly 200 to 60 cities that the airline operates from Las Vegas, according to Kelly Knox, Southwest Airlines Community Outreach Leader for California.

"This quick hop puts more people from across the country within quick reach of all the Coachella Valley has to offer, and helps locals save time in starting vacations, visits with family and friends, or doing business," Knox said in a prepared release.

The Palm Springs airport is currently experiencing a resurgence in travelers after the number of passengers dipped significantly in 2020 when the pandemic began. The airport reported that 120,657 passengers came through PSP in February, which is the highest volume since March 2020 when there were 198,850 travelers.

Data for March 2021 isn't expected to be available until next month, but officials say it appears local departures and arrivals are on the upswing.

"Just walking through the terminal, you can tell it's busier. I can see more people around," said Daniel Meier, deputy director of aviation, marketing and air service.

Air traffic is increasing across the nation with the start of the spring break season. According to The Associated Press, Tuesday marked the 13th straight day that more than 1 million passengers went through U.S. airport checkpoints.

As Americans begin traveling again, many airlines are resuming flights that disappeared last year as people canceled vacations and business trips.

There are 1,495 flights out of Palm Springs airport this month compared to 1,855 in March 2020, city spokesperson Amy Blaisdell said in an email.

Desert Sun editor Kristin Scharkey and reporter Amanda Ulrich contributed to this story.

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