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The Desert Sun

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 2021 | DESERTSUN.COM K1

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CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

California's reopening plan does not include Coachella

Millions gone from loss of large-scale events

James B. Cutchin and Eliana Perez
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

California officials aim to reopen the state's economy by the summer, but large-scale music festivals like Coachella are not part of the plan.

A target date for resuming large events like the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival is still undetermined, Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly said Tuesday. However, state officials will eliminate California's four-tiered color coded system for reopening on June 15 — if vaccine supply remains steady and coronavirus metrics continue to decline.

The local hospitality sector was divided on the new guidelines announced Tuesday and what they meant for the Coachella Valley economy. While some tourism officials celebrated the anticipated new allowances, others said the omission of the desert's biggest events is a major gap.

The state's public health department is working with local officials and other industries to work on reopening plans, Ghaly said.

Full capacity at some venues, like large convention centers with a capacity of more than 5,000, for example, won't be allowed indoor operations without proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test until October. International convention attendees will only be allowed if all in attendance are fully vaccinated, according to the new rules.

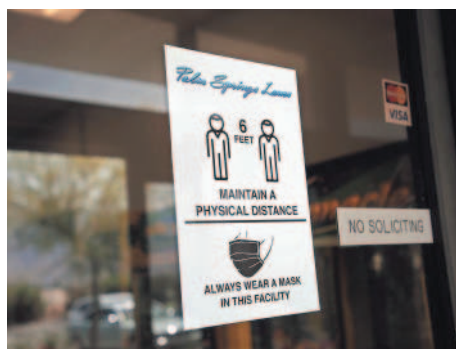
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No more tiers



Devin Daigle bowls at Palm Springs Lanes on Tuesday in Cathedral City. Riverside County has now moved to the orange tier, which allows bowling alleys and other indoor entertainment facilities to open at 25% capacity, up to 50% if all guests are tested or show proof of full vaccination. PHOTOS BY VICKIE CONNOR/THE DESERT SUN

California targets June 15 for statewide reopening



Palm Springs Lanes bowling alley sits open for business with COVID-19 safety protocols in place on Tuesday in Cathedral City.

Maria Sestito
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

California officials plan to eliminate the four-tiered, color-coded system for reopening businesses and other facilities by June 15 if vaccine supply remains steady and coronavirus metrics continue to decline.

"Our hospitalizations have been steadily decreasing for months," Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly said during a call with reporters Tuesday morning. "We have consistently low and improving metrics."

The state anticipates more than 30 million vaccine doses will be administered by the end of the month, Gov. Gavin Newsom said at a press conference Tuesday. The state received 2.4 million vaccine doses this week and 2.1 million the week prior, he said.

"We have confidence the numbers will continue to tier up," he said.

Until summer, though, the tier system will stay in place as counties move toward controlled reopening. Riverside County took another step forward Tuesday to the orange tier and will see

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No doggie bag needed at new Palm Springs restaurant

James B. Cutchin
Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

A new restaurant catering to canines and humans alike is coming to the desert.

Boozehounds, a pet-friendly restaurant, café and bar, will open its doors at 2080 North Palm Canyon Drive later this month. The sprawling establishment will feature a 3,812-square-foot restaurant, a 1,168-square-foot glass atrium and 2,020-square-foot outdoor

lounge. The outdoor areas will be fully open to pets, although the indoor restaurant will be humans-only in compliance with California safety code.

The new restaurant will offer food options for dogs, although its owners are tight-lipped about what exactly

these will include.

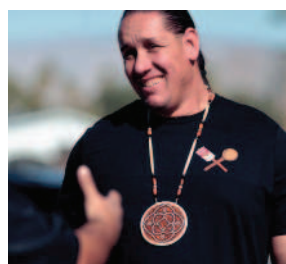
"There is a menu of food for dogs," said Boozehounds co-owner Jimmy McGill. "I can't tell you what's on it yet, but there is more coming soon."

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Agua Caliente seats settled

The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians has certified the results of its tribal council election held March 16. Among the results: John R. Preckwinkle III was elected to his first one-year term and Jeff L. Grubbe will continue as chairman.

Coachella Valley, 3A



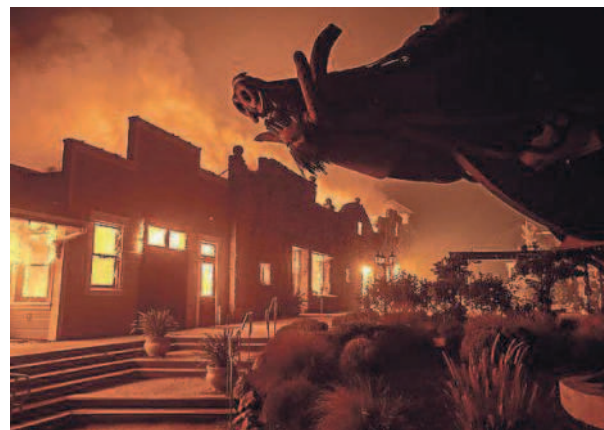
Agua Caliente Chairman Jeff L. Grubbe on Feb. 1, 2020. TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN



Biden moving up date of adults' vaccine eligibility

President Biden is moving up his call for all U.S. adults to become eligible to receive a coronavirus vaccine to April 19, two weeks sooner than his initial goal of May 1. COVID-19 response coordinator Jeff Zients said more than 28 million doses will be distributed across the country this week. 7A

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PG&E charged in wildfire

Flames from the Kincade Fire consume Soda Rock Winery in Healdsburg, Calif., on Oct. 27, 2019. The Sonoma County district attorney has charged Pacific Gas & Electric with five felony counts for starting the wildfire north of San Francisco. NOAH BERGER/AP

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Reopening

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more indoor capacity for local businesses this week.

A total of 16 counties moved to less restrictive tiers Tuesday as the state reached its goal to administer 4 million doses in its most at-risk communities, which effectively triggered a loosening of requirements.

More than 80% of the state is now in the orange tier, including Riverside County and most of Southern California. Some counties north of Los Angeles remain in the red tier; two counties are in the strictest purple tier and two are in the least-restrictive yellow tier.

Why June 15?

California's tiered system, called the "Blueprint for a Safer Economy," went into effect to phase the state through reopening. Statewide vaccine eligibility will expand to all Californians ages 16 and older on April 15, and the June 15 date was determined based on the eligibility timeline.

Ghaly said that the state wanted to provide newly eligible residents with sufficient time to receive both doses of vaccines before a statewide reopening. Six weeks was then added to account for the interval required between both Moderna vaccine doses, as sufficient antibody response is seen two weeks after the second dose.

California has administered more than 20 million doses statewide — Ghaly said recent weeks have seen more than 2 million vaccines administered each week. More than 70% of older Californians have received at least one dose, he added.

"We're ready to consider the next aspect of our pandemic response," Ghaly said.

The June 15 reopening date could change, however, if vaccine supply doesn't come through or if coronavirus metrics worsen.

Specific metrics have not been set, but Ghaly said hospitalizations will be considered as well as who is occupying beds — does it include people who have been vaccinated?

"So far, we know that even those who are vaccinated who do get infected with COVID generally see mild symptoms," he said.

What will change?

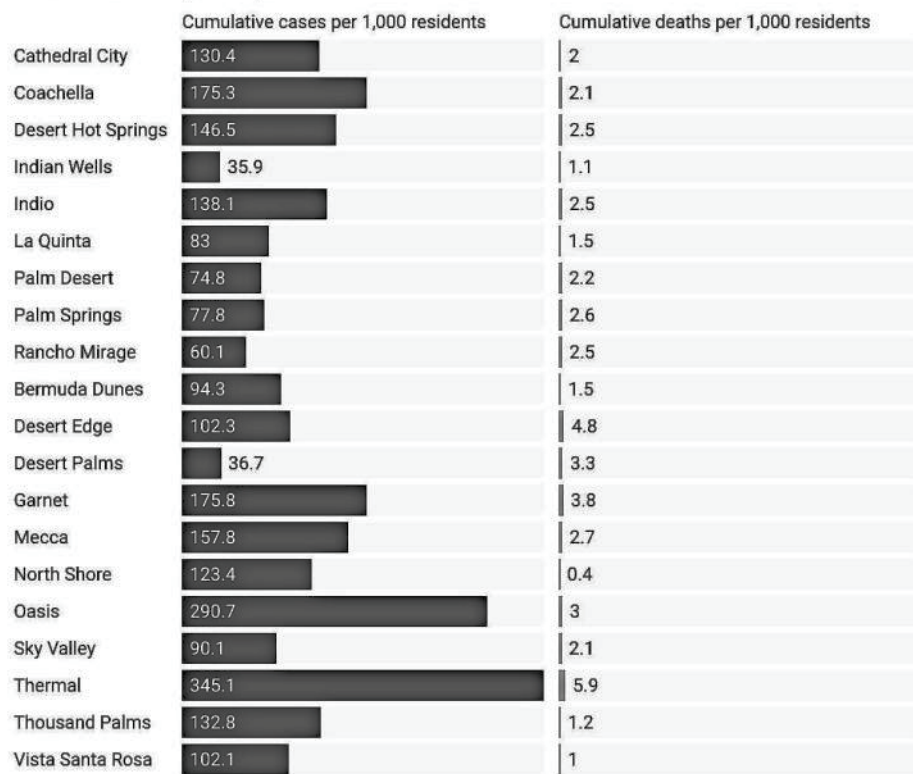
To get "beyond the Blueprint," Ghaly said, means "everyday activities will be allowed, businesses will open with common sense, risk-reduction measures." The move will phase out "specific sector-by-sector capacity limits," he added.

Residents should continue to wear masks and avoid crowds as the state moves toward the summer date, Ghaly said. The state's mask mandates will remain in place.

"We still see masking as a key protec-

Coachella Valley COVID-19 cases and deaths

The data reflect reported positive cases and virus-related deaths.



This chart is updated as of April 6, 2021.

Chart: Desert Sun staff • Source: Riverside County, Riverside University Health System-Public Health; population figures from Data USA • Created with Datawrapper

The data reflects reported positive case and virus-related deaths. CREATED WITH DATAWRAPPER

tive feature," Ghaly said. "We could see fully occupied settings," but with masks, he added.

There are some exceptions. Full capacity at some venues, like large convention centers with a capacity of more than 5,000, for example, won't be allowed indoor operations without proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test until October. International convention attendees will only be allowed if all in attendance are fully vaccinated, according to the guidance.

A target date for resuming large events like the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival is still undetermined, Ghaly said. But the state's public health department is working with local officials and industries to work on reopening plans, he added.

Newsom also said Californians should expect children "safely back in-person for instruction" by June 15.

The state hopes to drop vaccine eligibility from 16 to age 12 when the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention approves a vaccine for this age group.

The state will continue to monitor variants and how vaccines affect rates of transmission, Ghaly said. If hospitalizations rise, the state will take "the necessary precautions," he added. "Right now we are hopeful in what we're seeing," he said.

With mutations and variants, "you don't know what you don't know," Newsom said. The state will continue to make decisions based on data, he added.

"We are in a race against these variants," Newsom said.

In the meantime, county is in orange tier

More indoor operations in Riverside County can open this week as the county moves from the red tier to the state's less restrictive orange tier.

Changes take effect on Wednesday.

Counties could move from the red tier to the orange tier if they reported a case rate of 5.9 or less per 100,000 residents, 4.9% or fewer positive COVID-19 tests, and less than 5.3% positive tests among those in the most at-risk communities. Previously, counties needed to report an average daily case rate of 3.9 or less.

Riverside County reported a new daily case rate of 3.5 per 100,000 residents — down from 4.1 last week, a positivity rate of 2% and a health equity positivity rate of 2.3%.

The move to the orange tier has a small effect on high school sports in the Desert Sands Unified School District, which includes Palm Desert, La Quinta, Shadow Hills and Indio high schools. Student-athletes are now allowed to invite four family members to attend games.

Before Tuesday, they were only allowed to invite two family members. The four invitees are confined to family members; friends and other students are still not allowed to attend.

Here's what else changes in the orange tier:

- **Outdoor amusement parks** can reopen to county residents at 25% capacity or 500 people, whichever is fewer
- **Aquariums:** open indoors with modifications, increased capacity from 25% to 50%.

- **Bars** that don't serve food: open outdoors with modifications

- **Bowling alleys, family entertainment centers and escape rooms:** open indoors at 25% capacity for "naturally distanced activities" with modifications, up to 50% if all guests are tested or show proof of full vaccination.

- **Breweries and distilleries** that don't serve meals: open outdoors and indoors with modifications, at 25% capacity or 100 people, whichever is less

- **Churches, mosques, places of worship:** open indoors, increasing capacity from 25% to 50% with modifications.

- **Cultural ceremonies:** open indoors, increasing from 25% capacity or 100 people to 50% capacity or 200 people, whichever is fewer, with modifications

- **Dance and yoga studios:** open indoors, increasing from 10% capacity to 25% capacity with modifications

- **Gyms, fitness centers and indoor pools:** open indoors at 25% capacity with modifications

- **Funeral homes:** open at 50% capacity, increased from 25%, with modifications

- **Higher education institutions:** indoor lectures and student gatherings limited to 50% capacity or 200 people, whichever is less. Some courses, including labs and studio arts, may open at regular capacity. Student activities should be conducted virtually when possible, according to state officials.

- **Libraries:** open with modifications; previously limited to 50% capacity

- **Movie theaters:** open indoors, increasing from 25% capacity or 100 people, to 50% or 200 people, whichever is less, with modifications

- **Museums:** open indoors, increasing from 25% capacity to 50%, or 200 people, whichever is less, with modifications

- **Professional sports, race tracks:** open to regional attendees and live audiences at permanent venues at 25% capacity, with reservations and assigned seating, and in-seat concessions only

- **Restaurants:** open indoors, increasing capacity from 25% or 100 people to 50% or 200 people, whichever is less, with modifications

- **Weddings:** Indoor ceremonies are strongly discouraged but permitted with modifications. Outdoor and indoor receptions are permitted for up to three households, including hosts and guests, with 50% capacity.

- **Wineries:** open indoors at 25% capacity or 100 people, whichever is less, with modifications

Maria Sestito covers aging and the senior population in Coachella Valley for The Desert Sun. Please say "hello" via maria.sestito@desertsun.com.

Coachella

Continued from Page 1A

Further guidance for these large events has yet to be provided by the California Department of Public Health.

"We don't yet have the path for those to occur at the same size and scope that they have traditionally, but we are working with those organizers and event planners to make sure that we're on a path to allow those to occur ... likely after June 15," Ghaly said.

Indio City Manager Mark Scott said the city did not expect a change to restrictions for the Coachella music festival "in the near future." Scott added that he was not quite sure of the lead time that Goldenvoice, the Los Angeles-based company that produces the festival, would need to make it happen or what the fastest turnaround time could be.

"Like everybody else, I'm anxious to get back to a sense of normalcy," Scott said, but he added that reopening had to be done safely and following state guidelines.

The reaction of the local hospitality sector to the new guidelines was mixed.

Some, such as Palm Springs Resorts Chair and Hilton Palm Springs Vice President Aftab Dada, felt the ongoing uncertainty around events like Coachella



Hotel bookings dropped significantly because of the cancellation of festivals amid the coronavirus pandemic. The popular Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival is held at the Empire Polo Club, as seen here on Oct. 7, 2020. TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN

la and the BNP Paribas Open tennis tournament would be bad for large swaths of the economy.

"The economic impact of those festivals cannot be substituted," Dada said. "People come in from all over North America and (the world) for Coachella."

The music festival and its country

music counterpart Stagecoach typically take place over three weekends in April. Both festivals were postponed twice before this month's dates were canceled. The BNP Paribas Open was the world's first major sporting event to cancel in 2020, and organizers are hoping to get it back later this year.

A 2020 report from the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership found that the local economy will likely lose roughly \$1.4 billion from the cancellations of Coachella and Stagecoach in 2020 and 2021. Another roughly \$700 million was likely lost from the cancellation of the BNP Paribas Open last year, according to the CVEP.

Dada said businesses from hotels and motels to gas stations and grocery stores would continue to suffer from an ongoing lack of clarity around the status of the valley's largest events. "If you add all those up, the domino effect (on the economy) is beyond comprehension," he said.

Other tourism officials, such as Greater Palm Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau President and CEO Scott White, said the new guidelines were well-timed and well-considered. "I think we just saved a lot of business," White said.

Most of the events and conventions hosted in the area don't come close to the 5,000-person cap, according to White, leaving his organization generally upbeat and supportive of the guidelines.

"There were a lot of groups that we were talking to that were considering if they needed to move events to Arizona and Florida," White said. "This came

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Postal information

The Desert Sun, USPS #155-000, is published Monday through Sunday at 750 N. Gene Autry Trail, Palm Springs, CA 92262. Periodicals postage paid at Palm Springs, CA 92262.
Postmaster: Send address changes to Customer Service, PO Box 62670, San Angelo, TX 76906.