

NEWS RELEASE

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County of Ventura moves to the State's Red Tier
Allows more businesses to open indoors with modifications
County also exceeding State's new Health Equity Metric

Ventura, CA – Thanks to recent progress being made in the fight against COVID-19 in Ventura County, businesses such as restaurants, gyms, movie theaters, massage businesses and places of worship may now open indoors, following California Department of Public Health sector specific guidance for reopening, as of 12:01 pm today. The changes come after the County qualified to move into the less restrictive red tier of the State's [four-tiered, color-coded reopening system](#). Until today, Ventura County had been in the state's purple tier, the most restrictive tier.

"This is great news for our County and our business community. We will continue to advocate for our local businesses and appreciate this opportunity to move forward," said Mike Powers, County Executive Officer.

In order to move into the red tier, the County had to see average case rates drop below 7 per 100,000 people and testing positivity rates dip below 8%. For the past two weeks, Ventura County has met those benchmarks. As of Tuesday, the case rate is 5.5 per 100,000 people and the test positivity rate is 3.0%.

A new Ventura County Health Officer Order has been issued to align with the tier advancement.

Moving into the red tier means the following sectors can reopen with modifications:

- Places of worship, restaurants, movie theaters and museums can be operated indoors at 25% capacity or 100 people, whichever is less.
- Gyms can reopen indoors at 10% capacity. 12 feet distancing required in Ventura County.
- All personal care services such as massage, tattoos and piercing salons can open indoors.
- Indoor shopping malls can operate at 50% maximum occupancy (instead of 25%). Food courts can also open following the state's guidelines for restaurants.
- Indoor retail stores can now operate at 50% capacity (instead of 25%)

"The credit belongs to our residents, who have made lots of sacrifices and worked hard to improve our community transmission metrics," said Rigoberto Vargas, Public Health Director. "That same hard work must continue moving forward so that we don't revert back to the purple tier and instead continue making progress towards the next tier, orange, so that additional businesses can reopen."



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Elementary and secondary schools can reopen for in-person instruction by October 21 if the county remains the red tier for two more weeks. Currently, elementary schools can apply for a waiver from Public Health to reopen.

“COVID-19 is still circulating in our County. It’s important that community members continue to take all the same precautions so that we can continue to move forward: wear face coverings in public, maintain physical distancing, wash hands frequently and stay home if you're sick,” said Doctor Robert Levin, Public Health Officer.

Community members who have been exposed to a COVID-19 positive person, who have symptoms or who have contact with others outside of their household for their work are encouraged to get tested. [County testing sites](#) are available 7 days a week at no cost with no appointment needed. Short wait times and results within 24 hours are the standard right now.

Businesses and other organizations should review their [applicable industry guidance for reopening safely](#) from the state. Businesses must also be registered to reopen at www.vcreopens.com. If a business previously registered, they do not need to register again.

The California Department of Public Health has also issued a new Health Equity Metric that goes into effect today. The goal of the metric is to prevent spread among disproportionately impacted Californians. The County of Ventura has been committed to equitable response and serving and protecting the most vulnerable since the beginning of the pandemic. These efforts have included free testing, expanded testing hours and locations, contact tracing, multi-lingual outreach, assistance programs for food, rent and household bills, waived clinic fees, hotel vouchers, permanent housing and more.

“Unlike several other counties, the case rate and testing positivity rates in our most impacted areas do not stand to hold us back from moving tiers. In fact, our positivity rate has improved significantly enough in these areas that we might be eligible for an “accelerator adjustment”, whereby we can move tiers based on that metric alone, even if our overall case rate was to keep us in a lower tier,” said Rigoberto Vargas, Public Health Director.

The Health Equity Metric requires that the lowest Healthy Places Index (HPI) quartile be below 8%. To enter the state’s less restrictive Orange Tier, it needs to stay under 5%. The County is currently at 3.6% positivity rate for the lower HPI quartile compared to 3.0% for the County as a whole. The County will continue to support health equity with expanded outreach and support throughout the County.

For more information about COVID-19 in Ventura County, visit www.venturacountyrecovers.org.