

California now reporting 525 virus deaths every day

16 January 2021, by Adam Beam



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

More Californians than ever are dying from the coronavirus—a knee-bucking 525 every day—and with the number expected to keep climbing state officials said Friday they are sending more refrigerated trailers to act as makeshift morgues for overwhelmed county coroner's offices.

There are now 98 of the trailers to help county coroners store bodies "with respect and dignity," Office of Emergency Services Director Mark Ghilarducci said. In Los Angeles County, where on average a person dies every 6 minutes, temporary storage facilities have been set up in the parking lot adjacent to the coroner's office.

The Office of Emergency Services is using state hospitalization data to anticipate how many people may die in coming weeks. The state analyzes [multiple models](#) to try to predict hospitalizations and deaths. The "ensemble" projection that combines all the models is estimating another 10,000 people will die in the next three weeks.

It could be at least two weeks before the state knows the full extent of the virus' damage during the holiday season when many people ignored

pleas to stay home and not gather with friends and extended family. On average, about 12% of everyone who tests positive ends up hospitalized, so if there's a surge of new cases it will further overwhelm hospitals. And more people ultimately will die.

Ghilarducci said the state has activated its "mass fatality management plan" to try and avoid large backups in morgues.

"It is important to know that there is a plan, it is underway, and it is active today," Ghilarducci said. "We will continue to work at that with each of our 58 counties to ensure that all of these folks are taken care of in the most respectful manner."

The grim forecast stood in contrast to an upbeat news conference held Friday by Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and Gov. Gavin Newsom at Dodger Stadium, which is being converted into a vaccination center capable of administering 12,000 doses per day.

California has received more than 3.5 million doses of the vaccine and has administered just over 1 million doses. Newsom said the state was on pace to exceed his goal of giving out roughly 1.5 million doses by Friday.

Newsom tried to shine a light on encouraging trends: Hospitalizations, intensive care unit admissions and positivity rates—the percentage of people tested who have the virus—have all declined over the past seven days.

The numbers were enough for the Newsom administration earlier this week to lift the stay-at-home order for the 13-county Sacramento region, which includes the state's capital city and Lake Tahoe, a popular winter tourist destination.

The move allows hair and nail salons and other businesses to reopen and for restaurants to resume

outdoor dining and provides a slight increase to the number of customers inside [retail outlets](#).

"We're starting to see light at the end of the tunnel, not just the light that the vaccines provide," Newsom said.

California—the nation's most populous state with nearly 40 million residents—has averaged more than 41,000 new [coronavirus](#) cases each day for the past two weeks, dwarfing earlier outbreaks. While California has the second-highest number of deaths in the country, the state ranks 39th in the number of deaths per capita at 81.8.

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APA citation: California now reporting 525 virus deaths every day (2021, January 16) retrieved 30 May 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-california-virus-deaths-day-1.html>

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