

# California reopens churches 3 days after Trump threatened to ‘override’ states

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Gavin Newsom gave California churches the green light Monday to reopen, three days after President Donald Trump threatened to “override” states that continued to block in-person religious services due to the pandemic.

Newsom also was facing pressure from more than 1,200 California pastors who vowed to resume services this upcoming Sunday regardless of what the governor decided. At the same time, a lawsuit filed by a Southern California church reached the U.S. Supreme Court on Sunday night.

Church services, which had been banned since Newsom’s March 19 order, would look dramatically different under new state Department of Public Health guidelines. Religious services and funerals can host a maximum of 100 people, or 25 percent of building capacity, whichever is lower.

The state also advised caution around church singing. A religious choir practice in Washington state became a “superspreading” event in March that resulted in the majority of attendees contracting Covid-19 and two deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Congregants engaging in singing, particularly in the choir, and group recitation, should wear face coverings at all times and when possible, these activities should be conducted outside with greater than 6-foot distancing,” state the CDPH guidelines.

While Newsom is allowing churches to resume in-person services, counties have the ability to impose stricter rules than the state and can still prohibit them.

CDPH announced that retailers are allowed to reopen statewide for in-store shopping. The vast majority of counties — 47 of 58 — had already received state permission to open in-store retail. But some of the most populous counties, including Los Angeles and several in the San Francisco Bay Area, had not

requested that flexibility, either by choice or because they had not met the state's criteria for entering "Stage 2."

It was not immediately clear Monday how many of the 11 counties still in "Stage 1" would allow in-store retail. The latest guidelines are subject to county public health departments' approval and will be revised in 21 days, when the state Department of Public Health will "review and assess" the impact of reopening, taking into account Covid-19 incubation periods.

Use of face coverings, social distancing, extra sanitation, and temperature checks for staff are recommended for all businesses and organizations now allowed to open their doors. Retail does not include personal services such as hair salons, nail salons, and barbershops.

"Together, our actions have helped bend the curve and reduce infections in our state. As sectors continue to open with changes that aim to lower risk, remember that Covid-19 is still present in our communities," State Public Health Officer Sonia Angell said in a statement. "As more of us may be leaving our homes, keeping physical distance, wearing face coverings in public, and washing your hands frequently are more important than ever to help protect yourself and those around you."

The new guidance issued Monday also includes guidelines for protests and "political expression," limiting attendance using those same parameters and recommending protesters wear face coverings. The state is not prohibiting protests but warned of the health implications of mass gatherings and "strongly" recommended those acts happen online instead of in person.

Those rules come after hundreds of protesters gathered outside the state Capitol on Saturday.

"Activities like chanting, shouting, singing and group recitation negate the risk-reduction achieved through six feet of physical distancing," CDPH said. "Failure to maintain adequate physical distancing may result in an order to disperse or other enforcement action."

**Note:** See previous story: Federal court backs California Gov. Gavin Newsom's orders keeping churches closed

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