Is the state effectively containing the novel coronavirus (“COVID-19”)?
Weekly trends and risk assessment report for July 21, 2020

STATUS: UNCONTROLLED

COVID Exit Strategy (www.covidexitstrategy.org), a non-partisan group of public health and crisis experts, has been tracking the progress states have made towards containing COVID-19. On July 10th, as the epidemic worsened, the group added a new color to their grading scale, indicating states with uncontrolled spread of the virus. California is one of 20 states currently in this category – our state is not meeting the CDC recommended benchmarks for reopening, and the situation is getting worse.

Benchmark: Daily Cases per 100,000 population. STATUS: UNCONTROLLED

The CDC recommended that states demonstrate a 14-day trend of declining daily COVID-19 diagnoses. Daily infections in California have been rising steadily since late May. The current 7-day rolling average for daily case reports per 100,000 is 23, while many health experts recommend daily case incidence of 5 per 100,000 before reopening. Our rating for this benchmark will be moved to Red, indicating the state is merely “trending poorly,” if daily cases per 100,000 fall below 15 again.
Benchmark: Sufficient testing to track the spread. STATUS: YELLOW

A state should have sufficient COVID-19 testing capacity such that 5% or less of tests return positive. A higher number indicates a state is not testing enough to identify most infections. California’s 7-day average is 7%, 2% higher than the goal. To earn a green rating, the state must test enough to reach 5% positivity again.

Benchmark: Sufficient hospital capacity to avoid crisis care. STATUS: GREEN

A state should have enough hospital and ICU beds available (at least 20% over the last week) to take care of all patients without resorting to crisis standards of care. Over the last 7 days, California hospitals and ICUs have been around 60% full, meeting this benchmark.

Recommendations

While California is close to meeting our benchmark for testing, and the state currently has sufficient hospital capacity, both cases and hospitalizations have been rising rapidly since mid-June. We reopened before we were ready, and now we are seeing the results of that decision: the spread of the virus has reached levels that cannot be contained through a test and trace strategy alone. Accordingly, CALPIRG supports the governor’s decision to close businesses and return to lockdown until things can get under control.

NOTES AND CITATIONS

- Color rating is based on the recommendations of COVID Exit Strategy. View current data at www.covidexitstrategy.org.
- CDC recommendations are derived from the CDC’s “Opening Up America Again” framework, and CDC guidance released on 5/19/2020.
- Data for hospital occupancy based on state reports to HHS.
- Data for COVID+, test positivity, and hospital / ICU occupancy graph is derived from data collected by the COVID tracking project, at www.covidtracking.com.
- We do not track CDC metrics related to total testing volume, reported symptoms of COVID-like illness, and PPE supply due to a lack of consistent standards and / or publicly available data.