

NEWS > HEALTH • News

# California won't create a vaccine passport, but large events will be screened

Buffets and open bars are back on the menu for Californians this summer

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California will not require an official vaccine passport for residents when it lifts social distancing requirements and capacity limits on June 15, Health and Human Services Secretary Mark Ghaly announced Friday.

But the state will mandate that indoor events with at least 5,000 people, such as Golden State Warriors and San Jose Sharks games, verify vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test. That will require fans to obtain some sort of proof — whatever the venue decides to require — before they can attend.

“We are not at this time requiring or considering a vaccine passport for vendors,” Ghaly said. “We know the technology is being privately developed ... our intention is to provide some guidance.”



California's decision not to develop a state passport stands in contrast with New York state, which partnered with IBM to create the first state vaccine passport app, Excelsior Pass, in March. The free, state-funded app has been used to confirm COVID-19 test results and vaccination at sporting and performing arts events.

Ghaly's announcement came after the state met several encouraging metrics, including high vaccination rates and the fewest COVID-19 hospitalizations since the early weeks of the pandemic. Already almost 275,000 newly eligible Californians between the ages of 12 and 15 have received a shot.

State officials had previously announced they would mostly re-open California and end the current color tier system of coronavirus rules on June 15. They continue to mull what the mask rules will be after that date and how those will be enforced. But the rules on large events are finally clear.

In California, organizers of outdoor events with more than 10,000 people will be encouraged but not required to check for vaccination, a negative test or require masking. Indoor venues will be allowed to permit self-attestation in lieu of proof of vaccination or a negative test.

Though he is pleased with the planned reopening, Rufus Jeffris, the senior vice president of communications at the Bay Area Council, a business group, expressed concern about the state's approach to the vaccine verification issue. A patchwork system with multiple competing vaccine passport companies — which seems the likely result of Friday's announcement — could lead to confusion for everyone, he said.

"You get into more of a piecemeal type system, that creates opportunities for inconsistencies, or I suppose also creates opportunities where things could slip through," he said.

Among the venues that will be affected by the new requirements is the SAP Center where the Sharks play and which, pre-pandemic, was a popular concert venue with a capacity of 17,562. The team, which only hosted fans for seven games this season, required proof of vaccination or a negative test and never reached 5,000 people in attendance. No concerts have occurred there in more than a year.

Chase Center, the Warriors' new San Francisco home, can fit 18,000. The team already requires proof of vaccination or a negative test for fans and on Friday debuted a fully-vaccinated section with no social distancing requirement for their win-or-go-home game against the Memphis Grizzlies.



The team has been working with CLEAR, which allows users to present proof of a recent COVID-19 test through an app. The screening company will soon also allow users to show proof of vaccination on their phones.

Sarah Fink Dempsey, a spokeswoman for Another Planet Entertainment, which books concerts for the Greek Theater and Bill Graham Civic, said they are “thrilled by the news.” Both venues have an 8,500 person capacity, meaning the indoor Civic will have to perform verifications but the outdoor Greek will not.

“We are awaiting guidance from local health authorities in Berkeley, Alameda County and San Francisco before we post our protocols and procedures,” she said. “Indications are that all venues, indoor and outdoor, will be able to operate at 100 percent capacity.”

Ghaly clarified Friday that as of June 15 the state will no longer require physical distancing or limit capacity anywhere.

“We will continue to have some guidance on masking but it will be current,” he said. “We will do what we can to ensure that it aligns to the CDC and to ensure it is specific to different settings.”

Some businesses may also continue to require masks for the health and safety of their own patrons and employees if they choose, Ghaly said. Counties and other local health departments are also not precluded from imposing their own stricter requirements.

The changes could lead to a modest increase in new cases and some outbreaks, Ghaly said, but he believes those would be limited in scope and would not unduly tax the state’s health care system.

The Department of Public Health will also lift all isolation and quarantining requirements for travelers and will instead issue a travel advisory that aligns with CDC guidance.

The announcement will allow wedding planners, convention organizers, sports teams and others to plan “with certainty” that they’ll be able to resume without restrictions, said Dee Dee Myers, a senior advisor to Gov. Gavin Newsom.

“Restrictions around eating and drinking, open bars, buffets, things like that will all go away, and this will allow people to begin to really plan in detail,” she said. “We’ve gotten to this point and are excited to be moving forward.”

*Staff writers Jim Harrington and Michael Nowels contributed to this report.*



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