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# Placer County misses out on COVID tier change, reopenings. Will a state rule change help?

## See 'Let Them Play' rally in Rocklin to push for the resumption of high school sports

Student athletes in Placer County are joined by parents, coaches and business owners throughout the Sacramento region to advocate the importance of high school sports during a "Let Them Play" rally in Rocklin on Friday, Jan. 15, 2021, amid COVID.

Student athletes in Placer County are joined by parents, coaches and business owners throughout the Sacramento region to advocate the importance of high school sports during a "Let Them Play" rally in Rocklin on Friday, Jan. 15, 2021, amid COVID. By [Lezlie Sterling](#)

[Placer County did not move into California's red tier of coronavirus risk](#) in Tuesday's update, as its metrics faltered this week after weeks of decline.

Placer met two of the three criteria for moving out of the tight purple tier, but fell short when its case rate began to climb back up, halting the county's move into a lower tier assignment.

The state's three requirements for counties to move from purple to red are: a test positivity rate below 8%, "health equity" positivity below 8% in disadvantaged neighborhoods and fewer than seven daily cases per 100,000 residents, all for two consecutive weeks.

The California Department of Public Health on Tuesday reported Placer's overall test positivity at 3.4%, health equity positivity at 4% and a daily case rate of 7.7 per 100,000. Those rates in last week's update were 2.9%, 3.1% and six daily cases per 100,000, respectively.

“Our numbers were improving,” said Dr. Rob Oldham, director of health and human services and interim health officer. “I’ll say our case rate has been trending back up again, kind of following the national trend.”

There is an exception in the tier list rules that allow a county to advance if its overall positivity and health equity positivity rates are each below 5% for two straight weeks. In that exception, the case rate can be above the seven per 100,000 threshold, but it cannot increase by more than 5% from week to week; the move from six cases last week to 7.7 cases this week represents about a 28% jump.

“On tier assignment, I’m anticipating some disappointment looking at our case rate trending up,” Oldham said.

However, there are changes coming to the tier structure relatively soon that may retroactively place Placer in the red tier anyway, perhaps before next week’s regularly scheduled update.

CDPH announced last week that once the state has administered 2 million vaccine doses in disadvantaged neighborhoods — the lowest quartile of the “Healthy Places Index” — it will raise the threshold between the purple and red tiers from an average of seven daily cases per 100,000 residents up to 10 per 100,000.

CDPH guidelines say the change will be retroactive, adding a week of credit for any county that missed out due to having a case rate between seven and 10 per 100,000 residents, and that the state will provide an update to the tier list one day after this happens. That would apply to Placer, which would have met all three requirements this week under the soon-to-change rules.

As of Monday, CDPH reported this lowest quartile at 1.88 million shots, up from about 1.68 million mid last week, so the threshold could be crossed before the start of next week.

## **What could open in red tier?**

The advancement into the red tier would have allowed restaurants to resume indoor dining and a number of other types of businesses including gyms and movie theaters to resume indoor operations, with mask requirements and capacity limits.

The move to the red tier also impacts schools. In accordance with the state's recently formalized school opening plan, districts in red-tier counties must offer in-person instruction to grades K-6 as well as one grade of either middle or high school in order to be eligible for a portion of new COVID-19 safety funding from the state. Districts will be docked 1% of their share of that fund for each day they do not meet that requirement starting April 1.

Many of Placer's major public K-12 districts already meet those requirements to be eligible for the funding. Campuses were allowed to open last fall during the stretch in which the county was classified in the red and looser orange tiers, and CDPH guidelines allowed those schools to stay open even when the county fell back to the purple tier in November.

Late last week, a coalition of restaurant and bar owners announced a lawsuit against Gov. Gavin Newsom, claiming pandemic protocols violated the U.S. Constitution. Some of the restaurants within the coalition, such as House of Oliver in Roseville, have remained open in violation of the state orders.

Since the vaccine rollout began, Placer has ranked high among California counties in its rate of vaccine doses administered per capita.

The county in a detailed monthly report released Friday said about 76,000 of its roughly 400,000 residents had at least one dose and nearly 40,000 were fully vaccinated with two doses. For its adult population of around 315,000, those totals work out to nearly one-quarter of Placer adults being partially vaccinated and close to 13% fully vaccinated, both of which are the highest rates reported in the capital region.

Placer has not had its own local COVID-19 health order in place since September.

"Infections in Placer, California and the U.S. have been falling since the first of the year," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Robert Weygandt in a statement to The Bee.

"In Placer, the rollout of vaccinations has gone extremely well," he added. "The specific reason for lockdowns was to ensure we didn't overwhelm medical capacity. It's important to continue tracking trends, but with the horrible damage caused by restrictions, it's also very important to normalize as quickly as possible. It's horribly disappointing that the State has

decided to keep Placer in the purple tier when it is clear we are nowhere near meeting capacity in our hospitals.”

Michael McGough anchors The Sacramento Bee’s breaking news reporting team, covering public safety and other local stories. A Sacramento native and lifelong capital resident, he interned at The Bee while attending Sacramento State, where he earned a degree in journalism.

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