

Despite reactions, California says virus vaccine can be used

21 January 2021, by Don Thompson

California said it's safe to immediately begin using a batch of coronavirus vaccine doses after health officials urged a halt to injections and held a review because several people had reactions.

Wednesday's decision frees up more than 300,000 doses to counties, cities and hospitals struggling to obtain supplies. With the largest U.S. population at 40 million people, California has the second-highest COVID-19 death toll in the country behind New York.

The state Department of Public Health on Sunday urged a pause in the use of a specific lot of the Moderna virus after fewer than 10 people who received shots at a San Diego vaccination site needed medical care, possibly due to rare but severe allergic reactions.

But after a safety review and consultation with Moderna and health agencies, the state "found no scientific basis to continue the pause" and said vaccinations can "immediately resume," state epidemiologist Dr. Erica Pan said in a statement.

"These findings should continue to give Californians confidence that vaccines are safe and effective, and that the systems put in place to ensure vaccine safety are rigorous and science-based," Pan said, adding that some of her family members had received it.

Cheryl Brennan of Fallbrook was among those who had a reaction shortly after being injected last week at Petco Park, home of the San Diego Padres.

"At 18 minutes, it was like my throat started closing," she told KSWB-TV. "My blood pressure went to 185 over 125, which I guess is very life-threatening." Help came immediately.

"They hooked up electrodes. They put ice packs on me. I had four EMTs and two nurses helping me

and they brought my blood pressure back down within 45 minutes," Brennan said.

Brennan also said she still plans to get the second dose required for full immunization.

"I will still absolutely, positively go," Brennan said. "My opinion, if I get COVID, I would probably have a lot worse reactions than just having those issues ... And my husband has underlying health conditions, so it's worth taking that chance."

The release of the Moderna doses comes as California officials struggle to meet the challenge of vaccinating all those awaiting them, including millions of people 65 and older who recently were made eligible behind health care workers and people in nursing care homes.

California is getting 400,000 to 500,000 doses in a good week and it could take four to five months just to complete vaccinations for those 65 and older, Pan said during a state vaccine advisory committee meeting, according to the Sacramento Bee.

Large counties have been opening up more mass vaccination sites as they struggle with an unprecedented demand. Officials are pinning hopes on President Joe Biden's promise to ramp up vaccination resources.

"Under a Biden administration, our country has a fighting chance at defeating this virus," California state Sen. Scott Wiener said Wednesday.

Providers place vaccine orders, and the state reviews and submits them to the federal government, which can authorize and submit the request to the manufacturer. Counties have complained about lags and unpredictable distribution.

More than 4 million doses had been shipped and about 1.5 million had been administered as of

Tuesday, according to state public health department figures. Health officials have said the delay may be due in part to some doses not actually having arrived in the state yet.

With the all-clear for Moderna's vaccine, San Francisco will be able to use 8,000 doses it had put on hold and no longer expects to run out of vaccine on Thursday as previously feared, the San Francisco Chronicle [reported](#). Health officials had received fewer than 2,000 additional doses this week for city hospitals and community clinics.

Even so, the city hopes to vaccinate an estimated 900,000 people who live or work there by June 30, although it would have to double or triple its vaccination rate to 10,000 a day.

"The chief obstacle we are facing is not enough doses," said Roland Pickens, director of San Francisco's public health care system, at a supervisors' hearing Wednesday. "You only get it one way; you get it for free and you get it from the federal government."

Los Angeles County, with a quarter of the state's population, was straightening out problems with online and call-in systems that residents over 65 can use to make a vaccination reservation, said Barbara Ferrer, director of the county Department of Public Health.

But the real problem was supply. Ferrer said more than 70% of doses received for next week are already earmarked for second shots.

Former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger put in a vaccination pitch, posting a Twitter video of himself getting a shot in his bicep at Dodger Stadium's drive-thru site.

"Today was a good day," he wrote. "I have never been happier to wait in a line. If you're eligible, join me and sign up to get your vaccine. Come with me if you want to live!"

Meanwhile, California reported its second-highest number of COVID-19 deaths Wednesday but also a dip in hospitalizations below 20,000 for the first time since Dec. 27.

The total of 694 new deaths is second to the record 708 reported Jan. 8, according to the state Department of Public Health.

California this week surpassed 3 million COVID-19 cases since the outbreak began early last year. Nearly 35,000 people have died.

Most of the state was still under stay-at-home orders triggered by a lack of intensive care beds to handle COVID-19 patients. The spike was blamed on people ignoring social distancing and mask-wearing while gathering for the holidays.

Only a couple of weeks ago, it was feared hospitals in hard-hit areas might have to begin rationing care. But statewide hospitalizations have dipped 8.5% over 14 days, with the number of intensive care patients also easing.

In another bit of good news, the statewide positivity for the virus over a seven-day period has fallen below 10% for the first time in weeks—meaning statistically that each infected individual was now infecting less than one other person.

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