L.A. may become the biggest U.S. city with a second stay-home order

People wearing masks against the coronavirus shop along Alvarado Street in MacArthur Park in Los Angeles. (Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

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Los Angeles was one of the first major cities in the nation to impose a stay-at-home order when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.
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Few, if any, big cities in the U.S. have reimposed a second stay at home order after reopening. But Leicester, England — which is known for its garment industry — was forced to do so after a severe outbreak among heavily nonwhite areas of the city, according to the medical journal Lancet.

Even a less strict version of the spring stay-at-home order would be a devastating blow to Los Angeles, where the coronavirus has battered the economy and the county’s unemployment rate hovered around 16.5% in June. Many cheered when state and local officials began reopening the economy in May and June, hoping that social distancing, masks and workplace safety rules would keep COVID-19 in check.

But it hasn’t worked out that way.

Some people went back to old habits, such as participating in summer social events, and it’s becoming increasingly clear some employers are not enforcing safety rules. Latino workers are getting sick at disproportionate levels, and officials believe many are becoming infected at work and bringing the virus home.

Coronavirus cases statewide
As of July 22, 9:18 a.m. Pacific

409,586 confirmed
7,891 deaths

Statewide deaths by day

Gov. Newsom has rolled back reopenings. What’s closed or reopened in your county?

Stuart Waldman, president of the Valley Industry and Commerce Assn., watched with dismay as people ignored health guidance.

“The city reopened, but people’s behavior reverted to what they were doing before,” Waldman said. “Unfortunately, people jumped back in like the virus was gone.”

Another shutdown could leave businesses, already reeling from months of losses, at the breaking point.

“It’s very important for businesses to be able to plan, and if we keep opening and closing, that is not in the best interest of those businesses that are trying to stay open,” said Maria Salinas, president of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce.

On Monday, public health officials reported at least 3,128 new cases, pushing the cumulative total past 159,000.
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in May. But as cases ticked up again, many businesses in counties across the state were again ordered closed under an order issued by Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Garcetti was asked at the news briefing what would need to happen for him to support another stay-at-home order. Garcetti said he supported Newsom’s recent decision to shut down some businesses and that he is waiting to see the effects of those moves before acting.

“If you just go with this moment, you’re basically making decisions based on where we were two to three weeks ago,” Garcetti said.

Garcetti also said his goal was to get L.A. off the state’s watchlist. His spokesman, Alex Comisar, said that requires reducing disease transmission, lowering hospitalization and ensuring adequate hospital capacity.

Meanwhile, Garcetti told CNN on Sunday that “mayors often have no control what opens up and doesn’t — that’s either at a state or county level. And I do agree that those things happened too quickly.”

Despite his comments, local leaders like Garcetti are permitted to issue closure and stay-at-home restrictions that are stricter than those issued by the county or state, just not rules that are more lenient.

Garcetti in fact did so on March 19, issuing a stay-at-home order for the city of Los Angeles, while county officials stopped short of such an order. The distinction did not receive much attention at the time, however, since Newsom on the same day also issued a statewide stay-at-home order.

County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, when asked about Garcetti’s comments on CNN, suggested in a statement that the mayor was not left out of conversations about reopening the region.

“All of the decisions regarding the initial Safer at Home orders, the gradual reopening of businesses and activities, and the subsequent closures have been done in collaboration with local leaders and health officials, and guided by public health data,” Barger said.

At a news briefing Monday, Barger defended the decision to open up L.A. County’s economy, but added that the county needs to do a better job of getting out its message that reopening up society “doesn’t mean people can let their guard down.”

“And I believe that is what happened ... you had Memorial Day as well as protests that were taking place. People were not practicing social distancing and, in fact, in some cases, were not wearing a mask,” Barger said.
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