



OUTBREAK PROMPTS LOCKDOWN FOR JAILS

125 test positive for virus in
past week at county facilities

BY JEFF MCDONALD & KELLY DAVIS

A deadly new crush of COVID-19 cases is running through San Diego County jails, infecting inmates and staff alike and prompting a systemwide lockdown to try to control the spread of the virus.

The Sheriff's Department said a total of 125 inmates have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past week. Officials are awaiting results for another 188 people.

Two inmates died this week in county jails and the outbreak is suspected, sources said. The Sheriff's Department said their deaths are under investigation.

They are the 15th and 16th deaths in San Diego Sheriff's Department custody so far this year, which ties with the deadliest years in the county's jails over the past decade.

Officials said Gumerindo Aldava Alamos, 72, was found unresponsive in his
SEE **OUTBREAK • A6**

JUDGE DENIES REQUEST TO HALT UNIFIED'S VAX MANDATE

District's requirement was
blocked in another lawsuit

BY KRISTEN TAKETA

A San Diego County judge Thursday denied a group's request to immediately halt San Diego Unified's COVID-19 vaccine mandate and instead said it will take up the matter later this month.

The school district's vaccine mandate already was temporarily blocked by some 9th Circuit Court of Appeals judges in a different lawsuit that focuses on religious exemptions. However, district officials say they expect that block will be lifted soon because the district has removed a policy those judges objected to.

Thursday's decision by Judge John Meyer is the latest development in a lawsuit filed by Let Them Breathe, a statewide group based in North County that has fought school mask and COVID-19 vaccine mandates, including the one San
SEE **UNIFIED • A7**

CALIFORNIA'S WINTER TALE: A 'NO SNOW' STATE

Seasons with little or no snowpack could become common, new study reports

BY HAYLEY SMITH

It was 55 degrees and sunny Thursday at Sugar Bowl Resort, where the opening day of the 2021 ski season — already delayed because of warm weather — was still listed as "TBD."

"Winter hasn't quite arrived in Tahoe yet," officials wrote in a note about the postponement. "The team will be working nightly and ready to flip the switch when Mother Nature cooperates."

But the mountain isn't the only place feeling the pinch from lack of snow. A new study led by researchers at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory found that dwindling snowpack across California and the western United States could shrink dramatically more — or in some cases disappear — before the end of the century.
SEE **SNOWPACK • A8**



BRIAN VAN DER BRUG LOS ANGELES TIMES

Ice breaks up at the mouth of Convict Creek in the Sierra Nevada. Snowpack across the West is projected to shrink dramatically.

**"We're going to fight this variant
with science and speed, not chaos and confusion."**

President Joe Biden



EVAN VUCCI AP

President Joe Biden discusses his administration's new coronavirus strategy Thursday during a visit to the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md. He said the new approach "doesn't include shutdowns and lockdowns."

PRESIDENT OUTLINES NEW COVID STRATEGY

Biden renews focus on tests to fight Omicron, but some experts say plan falls short

BY SHERYL GAY STOLBERG

WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden, confronting a worrisome new coronavirus variant and a potential winter surge, laid out a pandemic strategy Thursday that includes hundreds of vaccination sites, boosters for all adults, new testing requirements for international travelers and free at-home tests.

After nearly a year of pushing vaccination as the way out of the pandemic, Biden has been unable to overcome resistance to the shots. His new strategy places a fresh emphasis on test-

ing — a tacit acknowledgment by the White House that vaccination is not enough to end the worst public health crisis in a century.

Biden's announcement came as several new cases of the Omicron variant were reported in the United States, including five people in New York state, a Minnesota resident who had recently traveled to New York City and a Colorado resident who had recently returned from southern Africa.

California reported its second case, in Los Angeles County. Health officials said the infection was most likely travel re-

**DID A COLLISION OF HIV,
COVID-19 FORGE VARIANT?**

■ **A6** • Researchers say it's the most plausible cause of mutation.

lated because the individual had returned home from South Africa via London on Nov. 22.

"The individual, who is a fully vaccinated adult and a Los Angeles County resident, is self-isolating, and their symptoms are improving without medical care. A small number of close contacts in Los Angeles have been identified and, to date, all have tested negative and have no symptoms," the county said in a

statement.

Biden's remarks at the National Institutes of Health were the second time this week that he had addressed the nation on the pandemic; on Monday, he spoke about new travel restrictions he imposed last week on eight African nations.

"We're going to fight this variant with science and speed, not chaos and confusion," Biden said Thursday. "Experts say the COVID-19 cases will continue to rise in the weeks ahead this winter, so we need to be ready."

Biden emphasized that his current plan "doesn't include
SEE **BIDEN • A6**

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION TO RESTART 'REMAIN IN MEXICO' PROGRAM

BY KATE MORRISSEY

The Biden administration will restart the "Remain in Mexico" program, which obligates asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their immigration court cases unfold, as soon as next Monday, according to an announcement Thursday from the federal government.

The reimplementing goes beyond what was recently ordered by a federal judge and includes an expansion of the program to any nationality from the Western Hemisphere. Under the Trump administration, the program — which began in 2019 and was known officially as "Migrant Protection Protocols," or MPP — was restricted to people from Spanish-speaking countries and

Brazil, where Portuguese is the dominant language.

The largest group likely to be affected by the change is Haitian migrants, who have found themselves targeted by immigration enforcement in Mexico and the United States this year.

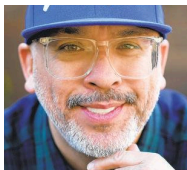
"We've obviously lost the battle on MPP, and now they are restarting this, creating this environment where people's lives will continue to be at risk — not that they care about those people to begin with," said Guerline Jozef of Haitian Bridge Alliance, which aids migrants, particularly Black migrants, in Mexico and at the U.S. border.

The initial version of the program dramatically changed procedures for asylum screening in
SEE **ASYLUM • A8**

NIGHT + DAY

FINDING THE FUNNY

Jo Koy is "Just Kidding" in comedy tour that features new material about life during the pandemic. **ND6**



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NIGHT & DAY

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KIDDING AROUND

COMEDIAN JO KOY
BRINGS HIS TAKE ON THE
PANDEMIC TO SAN DIEGO

PAGES 6-7

Now Playing!



George Abud, Jacque Wilke, Orville Mendoza, Bill Buell, and Cathryn Wake.
Photo by Jim Cox.

EBENEZER
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Pop music

So you want to head up to L.A. tonight for the annual **102.7 KIIS-FM Jingle Ball** at The Forum in Inglewood? Sorry to deposit a lump of coal in your stocking, but the show's sold out.

However, I've got a yuletide present of headliner **Ed Sheeran** for you just the same. Last week, Sheeran made a guest appearance on the Irish late-night talk show "The Late Late Show" as part of its annual holiday program "The Late Late Toy Show." In it, Sheeran performed with a Toy Show Choir of kids. It'll warm your heart, and it doesn't necessitate a traffic-snarled drive up the I-405. Available on YouTube.



Theater

What has also become an annual tradition is North Coast Repertory Theatre's staging of the musical drama "**Always ... Patsy Cline**." It opens Wednesday and runs through Jan. 2 at the Solana Beach venue.

I've seen this show a number of times, and for good reason: Not only are so many of Cline's tunes country-music classics (including "I Fall to Pieces" and "Crazy"), but her too-short life — she was killed in a plane crash at age 30 — makes for a compelling narrative.

On top of that, I enjoy every single time hearing a rendering of Cline's "Walking After Midnight." It's no coincidence that so many musicians in varied genres have recorded this song, from Garth Brooks to the Cowboy Junkies to jazz chanteuse Madeleine Peyroux. But no one could croon it like Patsy. northcoastrep.org

BY DAVID L. CODDON

ARTFULLY SPEAKING

WHAT'S NEW IN THE ARTS THIS WEEK



OCEANSIDE MUSEUM OF ART

Saki's exhibition "Birds of a Different Feather" is on view through Jan. 23.

ARTIST SAKI PLAYS WITH IDENTITY AND THE AVIAN WORLD

The wearable art of the Southern California-based artist **Saki** is by design transformative: "People who've worn my works become different people. They become more confident. They wear a different persona."

Saki's dioramas play with gender identity and the avian world at its most fanciful in her exhibition "Birds of a Different Feather" at the Oceanside Museum of Art. "Much of the art that I created is inspired by the LGBTQ community, especially drag queens and the concept of dressing extravagantly," explained Saki. "I want to just bring that attitude to everyone, not exclusively drag queens."

As to the gender roles connection: "With the human race compared to the rest of the animal kingdom we're unusual in that in modern-day society the women have been the ones getting all dressed up and wearing makeup, and usually the guys take a back seat in a typical hetero relationship. Now we've broken free of that. It's the males' turn to up their game a little and catch up to the women."

Each of the dioramas in the exhibition, which runs through Jan. 23, portrays a character inspired by a species of bird. "It's generally the case," said Saki, "that in the bird world the male far outshines the female."

Saki's presence at the OMA grew out of her co-winning a Juror's Choice Award at last year's virtual fashion event "Night of the Living Art: An Art After Dark Extravaganza." oma-online.org/saki



Film

Theater makers and insiders may stand and cheer in their living rooms for "**Tick, Tick ... Boom!**," the bio-musical film about composer **Jonathan Larson** that's now streaming on Netflix. Directed by **Lin-Manuel Miranda** and starring **Andrew Garfield** as Larson, "Tick, Tick ... Boom" is an adaptation of Larson's 1990 solo show of the same name that chronicled in song the tribulations of his personal life and of trying to get his musical "Superbia" to the stage.



Larson, whose death at only 35 in 1996 would precede by just a day the first off-Broadway preview of his groundbreaking musical "Rent," was a mentee of the legendary **Stephen Sondheim**, who the world lost just last week. "Tick, Tick ... Boom" is bursting with angst and energy, though it's overdirected by Miranda (making his feature-film debut behind the camera) and oversung by Garfield. Watch for numerous Broadway star cameos, though. Among them are Bernadette Peters, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Bebe Neuwirth, Chita Rivera and Daphne Rubin Vega, who originated the role of Mimi in the Broadway production of "Rent."

Coddon writes the Union-Tribune's Arts+Culture Newsletter, which is published every Thursday. Portions of that newsletter are reprinted in this column. To get the newsletter in its entirety, sign up for it at sandiegouniontribune.com/utartsculture.