

# ‘Eerie’ scene in San Bernardino County as businesses close amid coronavirus concerns



A woman walks past closed shops and restaurants at Victoria Gardens in Rancho Cucamonga on Wednesday, March 18, 2020. San Bernardino County approved restrictions on certain businesses including restaurants, gyms, movie theaters and bars due to coronavirus concerns. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

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Movie theaters, gyms, bars and restaurants in [San Bernardino County](#) have closed their doors or modified the way they do business as a result of recent orders by public health officials meant to slow the spread of the [novel coronavirus](#).

[On Tuesday, March 17](#), county officials called for the closures at least until at least April 6, while asking restaurants and other food establishments to follow the state's order to close dining rooms and offer delivery and take-out only. The county [reported its fourth and fifth cases Wednesday, March 18](#). No one in the county has died of the virus, known as COVID-19. Still, concerns over community spread has led to closures countywide.

[Orange Theory Fitness in Chino Hills](#) is among the gyms forced to close, at least temporarily.



A woman walks past the closed H&M store at the Ontario Mills mall in Ontario on Wednesday, March 18, 2020. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)

“It’s definitely a tough time right now,” owner Lauren Crisanti said.

The gym, which closed Tuesday, temporarily let go about 90% of its workforce and is encouraging clients to continue exercising at home.

“Fitness is a lifestyle, so nothing should stop just because their local gym facility has been closed,” Crisanti said. “We’re hoping to open our doors as soon as possible so people can return back to normal.”

The closures aren’t unique to San Bernardino County.

Similar orders have been given in [Riverside](#), [Los Angeles](#) and [Orange](#) counties to keep people from spreading COVID-19. Event venues, public buildings and schools have also closed as the outbreak continues to disrupt daily life across the world.

With businesses closed and many residents staying at home, shopping malls or typically busy centers are bordering on ghost towns. Signs letting customers know a business is closed, either voluntarily or at the recommendation of public health officials, can be seen in many doors and windows.

Aley Razook, of Rialto, and Sara Roman, of North Carolina, walked into a chilling scene at the Ontario Mills mall Wednesday morning. They hoped to pop into Dave & Buster’s, but it was closed, as were many of the mall’s stores.

“This mall is usually super busy,” Roman said. “Coming here, it’s really eerie and almost serene. It was very crowded before all this went down. Now it’s very calm.”

Simon, the mall’s owner, announced it will be closing all of its malls, including Ontario Mills, from 7 p.m. Wednesday until March 29.

Victoria Gardens in Rancho Cucamonga was also quiet Wednesday morning. Stephanie Stammersky, who works at a store in the mall, was sent home until April 2, but with pay.

The Jurupa Valley resident said she is spending time gardening and organizing. Her husband, who works for Disney, is off too, she said.

“I’m just doing things that, normally when you work in retail, don’t have time to do, which is rest,” she said. “Because you work with the public so much, you don’t mind being home and not having to deal with the public for a while.”

The order is also impacting breweries, many of which do not serve food, like [Escape Craft Brewery](#) in Redlands. The brewery has closed its tasting room, but is taking to-go orders so customers won’t have to go without their Redlands Nights orange blossom blonde, Lazy Day IPA and other craft brews.

“We’ve had all of our locals coming in and picking up beer to take with them both so they have beer, but they’re here to support us,” owner Melissa Fisher said. “It’s really hard. A lot of breweries are offering delivery. That’s something we’re certainly looking into. The majority of our sales are people in the tasting room having a beer while hanging out with friends and family.”

A small crew of employees are continuing to brew beer, however, Fisher said, the amount of brewing has been slowed to avoid a surplus. Brewery employees are also helping each other out, she said.

Those with spouses who are still working or have second jobs are donating their hours to employees who need the work, Fisher said.

“There’s only so many hours to go around to be honest,” she said. “So much of that income is tip based so if they’re not pouring beer they’re not really going to be seeing those tips.”

While it may be convenient to stock up on beer at local grocery stores, which are dealing with their own set of problems, Fisher said she hopes people will support local businesses.

Customers can still buy T-shirts and gift certificates, which will give the brewery money to help keep its doors open now and can be redeemed later.

“It’s totally surreal,” Fisher said. “Obviously we have to do the right thing to be safe and keep things contained and controlled. It’s really going to have a catastrophic effect on the economy and a lot of businesses. It’s hard enough day-to-day, let alone for potentially weeks on end.”

San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors Chairman Curt Hagman said businesses have been calling his office with questions about the order. He tried to clarify things in a Wednesday message to business owners.

The order provides exemptions for the vast majority of businesses, including “work” in general along with “grocery stores or charitable food distribution, certified farmers’ markets and shopping at a store or mall,” he said.

The only businesses that are prohibited from operating are those that serve alcohol and do not serve food, such as movie theaters, gyms and health clubs.

Restaurants must follow state guidelines. However, all businesses and individuals are strongly urged to follow prudent hygiene and social-distancing practices, he said.

Hagman encouraged businesses affected by the virus to look at the resources available from the state. County officials are also working to provide information about help businesses can s, he said.

For updates, email [supervisor.hagman@bos.sbcounty.gov](mailto:supervisor.hagman@bos.sbcounty.gov).