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L.A. sheriff orders all gun stores closed amid coronavirus shutdown



Customers line up outside Burbank Ammo & Guns on Magnolia Ave. in Burbank on March 17, 2020. (Raul Roa/Staff Photographer)

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Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva has ordered [all gun shops](#) closed and sales halted during the coronavirus pandemic unless the buyers are police or security personnel.

Villanueva said he sought to implement the closure [earlier this week](#) but was told by county lawyers that gun shops could be considered essential under county and state measures to encourage social distancing and cut the spread of the virus. The opinion forced the sheriff to [backtrack and suspend the closure](#).

But then Gov. Gavin Newsom's office said sheriffs do have the authority to make such closures.

[Villanueva said](#) he consulted with police chiefs across the county and decided that only police officers and licensed security guards will be allowed to purchase weapons and ammunition at the stores. Villanueva said the closure will apply to county areas and any cities patrolled by the sheriff's department.

He said police chiefs in other cities will decide whether gun shops continue to serve the public.

"This was a responsible medium to respect the chief of police in their jurisdiction," he said. The sheriff said he is now informing all gun stores in the sheriff's service area that they must close. He said Pasadena has told him that its gun shops will also close to everyone but security guards and law enforcement.

Amid the pandemic, officials have strengthened rules ordering all nonessential businesses to cease in-person operations and close to the public. Exceptions include food and medical services, transportation and social services.

"We have received complaints from particular businesses that have not been adhering to the social distancing. Chief among them [are] gun shops, nightclubs, bars and strip

clubs, so we have fanned out and are making sure these businesses are complying,” Villanueva said Tuesday in explaining the department’s original thinking. “We are trying to get them to close their doors. If they don’t close their doors, they will be cited,” which could mean the loss of a business license.

Some owners had already closed or were scheduling appointments.

Groups including Gun Owners of California said this week that they could go to court and fight to stay open.

Villanueva, a gun owner, noted that he supports the 2nd Amendment but said that given the spread of the [coronavirus in Los Angeles County](#), only essential businesses should be open.

“It’s not an issue of banning the sales of guns, which the 2nd Amendment is about,” he said.

Gun sales are surging in many U.S. states, especially in those hit hardest by the coronavirus, such as California. Among the factors fueling the increase are concerns from first-time gun buyers who fear an unraveling of the social order and those who worry that the government might use its emergency powers to restrict gun purchases.

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