



Office of the Governor
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Governor Pritzker Announces Mask Requirement for Pre-K-12 Schools, Long-Term Care Facilities, to Prevent Spread of Highly Transmissible COVID-19 Delta Variant

Employees at State-Operated Congregate Living Facilities Will be Required to Receive COVID-19 Vaccine by October 4th to Protect Vulnerable Residents

Hospitalizations, ICU Occupancy and Ventilator Usage Due to COVID-19 Infection Increasing Across State

CHICAGO – As COVID-19 infection rates across the state continue to increase and with a number of school districts not yet adopting CDC guidance on masking, Governor JB Pritzker and IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike today announced masks will be required for students, teachers, and staff at pre-kindergarten-12th grade schools and day cares across the state. The new requirement formalizes CDC guidance released in July on universal masking for both unvaccinated and vaccinated people in schools to ensure a safe return to classrooms.

The governor also announced that the state is informing the unions representing all state employees who work in congregate facilities of the intent to require that these employees receive the COVID-19 vaccine by October 4th. This includes staff in congregate facilities at the Departments of Human Services, Veterans' Affairs, Corrections and Juvenile Justice. The state is also requiring universal masking in

private long-term care facilities and strongly encourages owners of private facilities to join the state in adopting vaccination requirements.

The new measures are part of the state's ongoing effort to combat a new surge as the Delta variant rapidly spreads among the unvaccinated. Since COVID-19 metrics reached their lowest points earlier this summer, cases have soared by a factor of nearly 10, hospitalizations and ICU rates have more than doubled in a month, and the number of COVID patients requiring a ventilator has multiplied nearly 2.5 times over since July 16th. In June, 96 percent of people hospitalized in Illinois with COVID-19 were unvaccinated or only partially vaccinated, with the majority of those hospitalizations occurring in residents under 60 years old.

“Given our current trajectory in hospitalizations and ICU usage, we have a limited amount of time right now to stave off the highest peaks of this surge going into the fall,” **said Governor JB Pritzker.** “To combat the Delta variant, Illinois is taking three key steps to protect our state's 1.8 million unvaccinated children under 12 and their families, residents and staff of long-term care facilities, and those highly vulnerable people who rely upon state employees for their daily care. I also encourage every Illinoisan who is eligible to get vaccinated as soon as possible, as millions of their neighbors already have. This vaccine is safe, effective, and essentially eliminates the risk of hospitalization and death even from the Delta variant. In short, it's the best tool we have.”

“Vaccination is the best way we can prevent further spread, hospitalizations, and deaths due to COVID-19 and the Delta variant,” **said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike.** “Data show that the vaccines are preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death, and are effective against the Delta variant. We have the tools to turn the tide of another wave, but we need people to use them.”

Mask Requirement

In preparation for the start of the upcoming school year and in response to the highly contagious Delta variant, all students, teachers, and staff at pre-kindergarten – 12th grade schools and day cares will be required to wear masks regardless of vaccination status, effective immediately. This guidance is in line with recommendations from the CDC.

The state is also requiring universal masking in long-term care facilities regardless of vaccination status.

Illinois is home to 1.8 million children under the age of 12 who are not yet eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. With the Delta variant infecting the younger population at a greater rate and with people under 29 years old now accounting for 12 percent of COVID hospitalizations in June, requiring the use of masks is the most effective tool to allow students to return to their classrooms safely while protecting them from the virus. Mask wearing will also help prevent unvaccinated students from transmitting the virus to more vulnerable members of their broader communities.

The mask requirement is inclusive of youth sports and activities, with masks now required for all indoor extracurriculars and sports. In line with CDC guidance, masks are not required for activities outdoors where transmission risks and rates are lower.

The administration is providing free testing to all pre-K-12 schools in Illinois outside of Chicago, which received a separate federal funding allocation for testing.

IDPH also provided additional guidance for students and staff who are exposed to someone who tests positive for COVID-19. Close contacts of a positive case can remain in school if they receive testing on days one, three, five, and seven post exposure and if they wore masks at the time of exposure.

“The CDC strengthened its guidance last week for universal indoor masking in schools, and Illinois will continue to follow the science, data, and public health experts to keep students in school and keep communities safe,” **said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala.** “We know that consistent and correct mask use is the simplest, most effective way to keep students safely in school, where they can learn and grow to their fullest potential.”

A number of school districts across the state have already adopted CDC guidance and implemented a mask requirement to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 among students, teachers, and staff and the communities they live in. Those districts include the state’s two largest school districts, Chicago and Elgin U-46, as well as Edwardsville Community School District 7, Peoria Public School District 150, Champaign Unit 4 School District, Springfield School District 186, and Naperville School District 203.

To help schools across the state protect the health and safety of students and staff, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) has distributed 2.5 million free face masks to public schools since the beginning of the pandemic. The free masks grant every child the ability to access the learning opportunities provided by their school in person, regardless of their ability to purchase a face covering or make one at home. The administration will continue to supply masks to school districts as they request assistance.

COVID-19 Vaccination

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pritzker administration has implemented policies and guidelines in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) aimed at protecting the state’s most vulnerable residents. With the Delta variant causing a rapid increase in infection rates across the nation and Illinois, the state is taking additional steps to slow the spread of the virus in congregate facilities, where residents are most vulnerable.

With vaccination rates among residents in state congregate facilities largely being significantly higher than rates among staff, approximately 80 percent of the new

COVID-19 cases in state-operated congregate care facilities have been due to infection among employees. However, the individuals in these facilities, who frequently lack the ability to live on their own, are bearing the brunt of the consequences of unvaccinated workers as their hospitalization rate due to the virus increases.

The state is notifying the unions representing all employees who work in 24-7 state-operated congregate living facilities of the intent to require that these employees receive the COVID-19 vaccine by October 4th. This includes employees who work in state veterans' homes, developmental centers, correctional facilities, and juvenile justice facilities. Increased vaccination rates will help prevent and slow community spread, reduce the likelihood of infecting vulnerable populations, and allow for potentially less-severe illnesses for those who contract COVID-19 post vaccination. State agency leaders will ensure ongoing vaccination opportunities for employees at state-run facilities, as they have since vaccine was first made available to employees.

Governor Pritzker urged privately-owned and operated long-term care facilities to implement a similar vaccination requirement for their employees to protect the vulnerable residents they serve.

“As the highly contagious Delta variant continues to spread and evolve, our state guidance needs to do so as well,” **said House Speaker Emanuel “Chris” Welch.** “We know vaccines save lives and build herd immunity in our communities, so it is imperative that we encourage everyone to get theirs. But with the lower rate of vaccinations among teens and younger children not yet eligible to receive theirs, these are the difficult decisions our leaders must make to prevent illness and save lives.”

“When we follow medical science, we make progress against this pandemic. I applaud the governor for continuing to follow the science to protect the people of Illinois,” **said Illinois Senate President Don Harmon.**

“Keeping our veterans safe and healthy is a top priority, especially those in our state-operated long-term care facilities who were hit hardest early on in this pandemic,” **said State Senator Tom Cullerton (D- Villa Park), chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs committee.** “I commend the governor for taking the necessary actions needed to protect the most vulnerable in the state, as well as the workers who care for the veterans who have sacrificed so much for our country.”

"I want to thank Governor Pritzker for taking steps to secure the safety and welfare of our residents. These decisions are not easy, however not making decisions is not an option when the health and lives of Illinoisans are at stake," **said State Rep. Fred Crespo (D-Hoffman Estates).** “As he did in the past, Governor Pritzker is following the science, which is the only way to combat this pandemic. This is not a political issue, it's a very serious health issue. The sooner we act, the more successful we'll be in controlling the Corona Delta variant."

“Anything we can do to protect our most precious children who are still unable to receive vaccinations is essential. We have to do everything in our power to keep the COVID numbers down,” **said State Rep. Sue Scherer (D-Decatur).**

All Illinois residents over the age of 12 are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at no cost and proof of immigration status is not required to receive the vaccine. To find a vaccination center near you, go to [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

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