

# Gov. Pritzker Announces Illinois Plan to Lift Statewide Indoor Mask Requirement on Monday, February 28

## *Illinois Recording Fastest Hospitalization Decline of Pandemic*

### *Larger Percentage of Illinoisans Have Received a COVID-19 Shot than Anywhere in Midwest*

**CHICAGO** – With statewide COVID-19 hospitalization rates declining faster than any other point in the pandemic, Illinois is on track to lift the statewide indoor mask requirement on Monday, February 28, 2022. Mask requirements will continue where federally mandated, such as on public transit and in high-risk settings including healthcare facilities and congregate care. Masking requirements will also continue to apply in all daycare settings. The state intends to continue masking requirements in P-12 schools subject to pending litigation which impacts a number of schools. As the CDC reaffirmed just today, masks remain a critical tool to keep schools safe and open.

The state reaches this point with more than 21.4 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine administered to Illinois residents. Per the [CDC](#), Illinois continues to lead the Midwest in people who have received at least one shot, with 75.7% of people having received their first dose. Illinois also has the most fully vaccinated 17-and-under population in the region, though across the nation, youth vaccination rates continue to trail adult rates.

“We are now seeing the fastest rate of decline in our COVID-19 hospitalization metrics since the pandemic began. If these trends continue — and we expect them to — then on Monday, February 28th, we will lift the indoor mask requirement for the State of Illinois,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “I want to be clear: Many local jurisdictions, businesses and organizations have their own mask requirements and other mitigations that must be respected. Throughout this pandemic, we’ve deployed the tools available to us as needed. Our approach has saved lives and kept our economy open and growing.”

Today the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is reporting 4,742 new confirmed and probable cases and 2,496 people in the hospital with COVID-19. IDPH is also reporting 449 people with COVID-19 in the ICU and 243 people on ventilators. With 20% of ICU beds now available statewide, this marks the fastest rate of decline in the hospital metrics since the pandemic began.

“While masks will no longer be required in most indoor locations beginning February 28, they are still recommended,” **said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike**. “Masks offer a layer of protection and for people who have an underlying health condition or who are around those who do, you may choose to continue wearing a mask. Similarly, if you find yourself in a crowded, indoor setting, a mask can still help protect you. We will continue to recommend masks.”

### **Statewide Indoor Mask Requirement**

Illinoisans can resume activities without wearing a mask indoors on February 28th except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance. Federal requirements, in effect through at least March 18, include all [transportation systems](#) such as airports, planes, trains, and buses.

“Preparing to repeal statewide masking mandates at the end of the month is aggressive and optimistic but reasonable,” **said Dr. Emily Landon, University of Chicago Medicine, Executive Medical Director of Infection Prevention and Control**. “Broad mandates are not about individuals. They are put in place to help protect communities, businesses, and healthcare

access. Repealing the mask mandate allows people to choose the mitigation layers that are best for them and I have no doubt that many should and will choose to keep mask rules.”

To account for the risk of community spread among more vulnerable populations, and in accordance with CDC guidance, Illinois will continue to require masks in the following settings:

- Healthcare Settings: Continue mask requirement
- Long Term Care Facilities: Continue mask requirement
- Congregate Settings (prisons, shelters, etc.): Continue mask requirement
- Transportation: Follow [federal guidelines](#)
- Daycare: Follow [Department of Children and Family Services \(DCFS\) guidelines](#)

Municipalities and businesses in most industries may choose to continue to implement more strict public health mitigations as they deem appropriate, including requiring masks.

### **School Settings**

Nationally, 23% of 5- to 11-year-olds and 56% of 12- to 17-year-olds are fully vaccinated, compared to 71% of 18-to-64-year-olds and 89 percent of those 65 and up. This disparity leaves schools at far greater risk of significant outbreaks than the general population. Additionally, school environments can include younger children who aren't yet vaccine-eligible.

Given that schools need more time for community infection rates to drop, for young children to become vaccine eligible, and for more parents to have their kids vaccinated, masks will continue to be required in P-12 school settings unless pending litigation impacts a school.

“Children’s social-emotional and academic growth is best supported in the in-person educational setting, so extra precaution should be taken to prevent disruption and avoid adaptive pauses and remote learning,” **said Dr. Zach Rubin, a pediatric immunologist based in DuPage County.**

“Maintaining masking and mitigation practices in the school environment buys us more time for infection rates to drop, for parents to get their 5-to-17-year-olds vaccinated, and for the 6 month to 4 years age group to become vaccine eligible.”

The FDA’s Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee will meet to discuss authorizing the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 mRNA vaccine for administration to children 6 months through 4 years of age on February 15th. The request for authorization will also be reviewed by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the CDC.

### **Pandemic Relief**

To help businesses recover from the pandemic, the Governor in partnership with the General Assembly, has awarded nearly \$1 billion in grants to more than 12,000 small businesses across every sector of the Illinois economy. As a result, tens of thousands of Illinois residents have been able to keep their jobs.

“Governor Pritzker continues to use a data-based approach to keeping Illinoisans safe and growing our Illinois economy,” **said Acting DCEO Director Sylvia I. Garcia.** “This policy strikes the right balance for businesses, communities and individuals across our state.”

Illinois returned to a statewide indoor mask requirement on August 30, 2021, as ICU bed availability in certain regions of the state dropped into the low single digits. Illinois required masks in all P-12 schools and daycares on August 4, 2021, following the strong recommendation of the CDC.

According to the CDC, it is critical that individuals continue to use and layer [prevention strategies](#). All Illinois residents over the age of 5 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, visit [vaccines.gov](#).