

Harrisburg, PA - As Pennsylvania experiences a resurgence of COVID-19 cases with significantly higher daily case counts than in the spring and hospitalizations on the rise, the Wolf Administration has identified four new mitigation efforts, which Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine announced today.

“It is our collective responsibility to protect our communities and our most vulnerable Pennsylvanians from COVID-19 and to continue to work together to get through this pandemic. These targeted mitigation efforts, combined with existing ones, are paramount to saving lives and protecting our economy,” Gov. Wolf said. “The administration will continue to monitor the risks posed by COVID-19 across the commonwealth and will reinstate or institute new targeted mitigation tactics as necessary.”

The efforts announced today include:

Protecting Our Health Care System

Dr. Levine issued a memorandum *Opens In A New Window* to acute care hospitals outlining expectations to care for Pennsylvanians who need care during the pandemic.

Hospitals are to work through the established health care coalitions and other partnerships to prepare for how they will support one another in the event that a hospital becomes overwhelmed during the pandemic. Hospitals should also be working to move up elective procedures necessary to protect a person’s health and prepare to suspend them if our healthcare system becomes strained.

Restrictions on elective surgeries put into effect in March and lifted in April were to help with both PPE and bed capacity and were considered successful.

Hospitalizations are increasing, as are ICU patients, and according to modeling from the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, which does not take into account hospitalizations from influenza, Pennsylvania will run out of intensive care beds in December if ICU admissions continue at the current rate.

The same modeling indicates we will have sufficient medical-surgical beds with some uncertainty as to capacity from region to region.

Traveler Testing

Dr. Levine issued an order *Opens In A New Window* requiring anyone who visits from another state to have a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours prior to entering the commonwealth.

If someone cannot get a test or chooses not to, they must quarantine for 14 days upon arrival in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvanians visiting other states are required to have a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours prior to their return to the commonwealth or to quarantine for 14 days upon return to Pennsylvania.

This order, which takes effect on Friday, November 20, does not apply to people who commute to and from another state for work or medical treatment.

Strengthened Masking Order

Dr. Levine first issued a masking order on April 15. The order signed today Opens In A New Window strengthens this initial order with these inclusions:

Masks are required to be worn indoors and outdoors if you are away from your home.

When outdoors, a mask must be worn if you are not able to remain physically distant (at least 6 feet away) from someone not in your household the entire time you are outdoors.

When indoors, masks will now be required even if you are physically distant from members not in your household. This means that even if you are able to be 6 feet apart, you will need to wear a mask while inside if with people other than members of your household.

This order applies to every indoor facility, including homes, retail establishments, gyms, doctors' offices, public transportation, and anywhere food is prepared, packaged or served.

Colleges and Universities

The departments of Health and Education issued recommendations Opens In A New Window for colleges and universities to implement a testing plan for when students return to campus following the holidays.

These recommendations include establishing routine protocols for testing.

Colleges and universities should have adequate capacity for isolation and quarantine and should be prepared to enforce violations of established policies such as mask wearing and physical distancing.

Every college and university should test all students at the beginning of each term, when returning to campus after a break and to have regular screening testing throughout the semester/term.

"We must remain united in stopping COVID-19," Dr. Levine said. "Wear a mask, wash your hands, stay apart and download the COVID Alert PA app. If you test positive, please answer the call of the case reviewer and provide information that can help protect others. It's the selfless, right thing to do."

There is reference to exceptions in Section #3

Section 3: Exceptions to Covering Requirement:

The following are exceptions to the face covering requirements in Section 2. All alternatives to wearing a face covering, including the use of a face shield, should be exhausted before an individual is excepted from this Order.

A. If wearing a face covering while working would create an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

B. If wearing a face covering would either cause a medical condition, or exacerbate an existing one, including respiratory issues that impede breathing, a mental health condition or a disability.

C. When necessary to confirm the individual's identity.

D. While obtaining a service that requires the temporary removal of the face covering, such as dental services.

E. When working alone and isolated from interaction with other people with little or no expectation of in-person interaction.

F. If an individual is communicating or seeking to communicate with someone who is hearing-impaired or has another disability, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.

Also the FAQ is helpful for to clarify information for schools: Universal Face Coverings Order FAQ.

Under what circumstances are students permitted to remove their face coverings?

School entities may allow students to remove face coverings when students are:

Eating or drinking when spaced at least six feet apart; or

When wearing a face covering creates an unsafe condition in which to operate equipment or execute a task; or

At least six feet apart during "face-covering breaks" to last no longer than 10 minutes.

Do students with disabilities need to wear face coverings?

Children two years old and older are required to wear a face covering unless they have a medical or mental health condition or disability, documented in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), that precludes the wearing of a face covering in school. Accommodations for such students should be made in partnership with the student's health care provider, school nurse, and Individual Education Plan (IEP)/Section 504 team.

Please see the attached link for updated traveler information from the PA Secretary of Health. This order goes into effect on November 20:

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Travelers.aspx>