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Gov. Wolf: State Anticipates Returning K-12 School Mask Requirement to Local Leaders January 17, 2022

Upon expiration, school mitigation efforts revert to school leaders

Harrisburg, PA – Governor Tom Wolf today announced the intention to return the commonwealth’s K-12 school mask requirement to local leaders on January 17, 2022. Upon the expiration of the statewide mandate, local school officials will again be able to implement mitigation efforts at the local level. At that time, schools may continue requiring mask-wearing based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance.

“The school mask order has been critical in ensuring Pennsylvania’s children could safely learn and grow in an in-person classroom setting at the beginning of the school year,” said Gov. Wolf. “During the announcement, my administration made clear that we would continue to reevaluate the status of the school mask mandate. Now, we are in a different place than we were in September, and it is time to prepare for a transition back to a more normal setting. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 virus is now a part of our daily lives, but with the knowledge we’ve gained over the past 20 months and critical tools like the vaccine at our disposal, we must take the next step forward in our recovery. With more than 70 percent of adults vaccinated in Pennsylvania and the recently expanded vaccine eligibility, I strongly encourage parents to take safety measures to protect your children and your family – like getting vaccinated.”

The current Secretary of Health [order](#) requires masks to be worn inside K-12 school buildings, early learning programs and child care providers for both children and adults regardless of vaccination status. The full order remains in effect until an additional announcement in mid-January at which time the administration anticipates local K-12 school officials will again be able to implement mitigation efforts at the local level. The full order will remain in effect for early learning programs and child care providers until further notification.

“We at the department of education are so appreciative of all that our schools are doing to help teachers and students navigate the incredible challenges we’ve faced during the pandemic,” said Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Secretary Noe Ortega. “We know the mitigation steps we need to implement to keep people safe and keep kids learning in the classroom. School leaders have always made decisions about how to maintain order in schools and ensure that all students have quality learning opportunities. We look forward to working with our schools as they continue to navigate the pandemic and are available to provide them assistance, resources, and best practices.”

“Evidence of the effectiveness of masking has been so clearly demonstrated over the past three months in schools that we are confident local school leaders will take the steps necessary at the local level to preserve in-person education,” said Department of Health (DOH) Acting Secretary Alison Beam. “While we continue to monitor data such as pediatric hospital capacity and case counts, we want to give local leaders plenty of time to prepare for the anticipated expiration of the order. We strongly encourage schools to follow CDC guidance and make decisions with the health of their educators and students in mind. Likewise, we strongly encourage parents to talk to their children’s pediatricians and get their child vaccinated. Vaccinations give your child the power to safely learn, play and be a kid.”

In August, the Acting Secretary of Health signed [an order](#) ensuring vaccine availability for school districts interested in hosting vaccination clinics to support Pennsylvanians in creating safe learning environments. This order still applies to vaccine providers across the commonwealth and schools are encouraged to take advantage of the vaccine partnerships with the availability of the pediatric vaccine. Currently, Pennsylvania ranks 5th nationally in first doses of vaccine administered with more than 70 percent of Pennsylvanians ages 18 and older fully vaccinated.

“I have said repeatedly that the vaccine is our strategy out of the pandemic here in the commonwealth and Pennsylvanians are doing their part,” said Gov. Wolf. “With the availability of the pediatric vaccine, I encourage parents to talk to their doctors and pharmacists about getting their child vaccinated, as that is the one, scientific way to keep ourselves and loved ones safe. Thank you to all Pennsylvanians for doing your part and ultimately taking care of your loved ones and neighbors.”

Pennsylvanians ages 5 and older are now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. To find a vaccine provider near you, visit [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

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