

# Despite virus surge, Arizona governor won't require masks

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Coronavirus infections are surging in Arizona. Hospitalizations are increasing and more people are dying since the state relaxed stay-at-

home orders last month.

But in one of the nation's COVID-19 hot spots, Gov. Doug Ducey is not requiring residents of the Grand Canyon state to wear [masks](#) in public, and it seems a good many people agree with him.

In shopping malls, restaurants and the crowded bar scenes of Scottsdale and Tempe, most patrons have disdained the use of cloth [face masks](#) that [health officials](#) advocate to help slow the spread of [coronavirus](#).

Robert Fowler, a truck driver in Phoenix, wears a mask as required for work but otherwise he goes about mask-free.

"I'm not worried about it," Fowler said while waiting for a table Thursday at Snooze A.M. Eatery, where the patio was full and only employees were seen donning face masks.

Despite COVID-19 case numbers trending upward, Fowler has no plans to change.

"Everybody's going to get COVID one way or the other eventually," he said. "People are gonna do what they want to do regardless."

In a red state with a Republican governor, the trend seems to be to follow President Donald Trump's lead. Get the state reopened and keep the face masks in your pocket—that's where Ducey kept his Thursday during a news conference in which he dismissed concerns that the dramatic increase in virus cases may overwhelm hospitals.

The governor did say he recommended wearing masks when social distancing is impossible, but he has rarely been seen wearing one himself. Ducey wore one when he met last month with Trump, who wasn't wearing one, at a Honeywell plant ramping up mask production.

"There are some people that can't wear masks for whatever reason, shortness of breath or they are asthmatic," Ducey said in response to a question about why he wasn't requiring masks. "But we want to do a better job from a public health communications standpoint that masks are a good thing when you can't social distance—wear a mask, wash your hands."

Some think the governor is making a mistake. Ricky Young, who wore a mask for her appointment at a Phoenix salon, said it's "ridiculous" that the public at large isn't wearing masks inside stores and other businesses.

"I wear it for my safety and for the other person's safety," said Young, who is 93. "Let's cooperate. I've lived too long."

She also found it perplexing that Ducey hasn't worn a mask in public appearances or in meetings. She believes he's putting off the inevitable decision to reimpose stay-at-home orders and wonders if he's acting out of politics.

"I think he's stupid," Young said "He baffles me. Sometimes he's too cozy with Trump."

Public health and medical officials outside state government have started pleading with Arizonans to wear masks after a recent surge in cases that is threatening to set off a cascade of new hospitalizations. They note scientific evidence that wearing cloth masks in public prevents people who don't realize they're infected from spreading the virus, and protects those not exposed as well.

Some parts of the country have acted on masks. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo ordered residents to wear masks in public places in April; In California, counties have the option to require masks and some have done so.

With nearly all of Ducey's closure orders ended, pushing social distancing and requiring masks are about all that can be done to prevent transmission of an airborne virus in public spaces.

Not all of Arizona is a mask-optional zone: Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport started requiring everyone on airport property to wear masks on June 1, Phoenix and Maricopa County have started requiring employees to wear masks, and Arizona State University announced Friday that students, staff and visitors are required to wear face coverings when inside or in areas where social distancing isn't possible, effective immediately.

"ASU had already announced this requirement for the start of the fall semester," President Michael Crown said in a statement. "But, given the current rise in COVID-19 cases we're seeing in Arizona and a lax attitude toward face coverings and other social distancing measures since Gov. Ducey's Stay At Home Executive Order was lifted, we feel it is important to accelerate our policy."

Dr. Rebecca Sunenshine, Maricopa County's disease control director, on Wednesday said the county is now urging everyone to wear masks in public. That's a reversal for Sunenshine, who early in the pandemic said there was no evidence masks could help prevent the virus' spread.

"Now there is a mounting body of [scientific evidence](#) that shows that a cloth face mask, a well-fitted cloth face mask, can prevent COVID-19 from spreading," Sunenshine said. She also noted a huge surge of cases in the county, the state's most populous. A full 27% of the cases have come in the past week.

Testing has been increasing in Arizona, which raises the chance of finding new cases. But the proportion of tests coming back positive also has been rising.

An Associated Press analysis found Arizona had a rolling average of fewer than 400 new cases a day at the time the shutdown was lifted May 15, but it shot up two weeks later and surpassed 1,000 new cases a day by early this week. Hospitalizations also have risen dramatically, hitting the 1,200 mark a week ago.

The state passed another grim milestone June 5, marking its 1,000th death. Nearly 150 more deaths have been counted since. And it topped 32,000 cases on Friday, when it added more than 1,600 new cases, the most ever.

Since restaurants were allowed to do dine-in last month, four have had to close because of COVID-19 exposure. Two of those closures, a Phoenix restaurant and a Tempe brewery, happened this week.

Shelby Quinn, 22, wears a mask at the athletic wear store where she works and when she goes out because of an autoimmune disorder. But she's skeptical of making face masks mandatory.

"Personally, I feel like it's up to them. It's definitely their choice," Quinn said. "But I wouldn't try to force it on them."

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some—especially older adults and people with existing health problems—it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death.

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