

Florida board reverses mask mandate, complies with DeSantis

August 3 2021, by Freida Frisaro



A group waits to get a COVID-19 test, Saturday, July 31, 2021, in North Miami, Fla. Federal health officials say Florida has reported 21,683 new cases of COVID-19, the state's highest one-day total since the start of the pandemic. The state has become the new national epicenter for the virus, accounting for around a fifth of all new cases in the U.S. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has resisted mandatory mask mandates and vaccine. Credit: AP Photo/Marta Lavandier

A South Florida school district that voted last week to require facial coverings when in-person learning resumes this month now says it will comply with Gov. Ron DeSantis' executive order preventing mask mandates in schools, rather than enforce the recommendation of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Broward County Public Schools intends to comply with the Governor's latest Executive Order," says the district statement, released Monday afternoon.

With coronavirus caseloads surging as the much more contagious delta variant spreads infections, the board unanimously voted last week to require students, teachers and staff—even those who are vaccinated—to wear facial coverings inside schools when classes begin Aug. 18.

Broward's board took the action last week in response to the latest science on the virus, which suggests that while vaccinated people are extremely unlikely to be hospitalized or die from COVID-19, they can still spread infection among those who haven't had their shots. This revelation prompted the CDC to issue [new guidance](#), recommending "universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of [vaccination status](#)."

The Republican governor then signed an order empowering the state's Board of Education to withhold funding from districts that enforce a mask mandate. DeSantis said he wants parents to decide whether their children should wear a mask to [school](#). He also claimed the outbreak is seasonal, caused by people gathering indoors to avoid Florida's heat and humidity.



Raquel Heres gets a COVID-19 rapid test to be able to travel overseas, Saturday, July 31, 2021, in North Miami, Fla. Federal health officials say Florida has reported 21,683 new cases of COVID-19, the state's highest one-day total since the start of the pandemic. The state has become the new national epicenter for the virus, accounting for around a fifth of all new cases in the U.S. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has resisted mandatory mask mandates and vaccine. Credit: AP Photo/Marta Lavandier

In fact, Florida now leads the nation in per capita hospitalizations for COVID-19. On Monday, [Florida had 10,389 new COVID-19 hospitalizations](#), according to the hospital association. That's almost 200 more than Sunday, when the state broke the previous record set on July 23, 2020, more than a half-year before vaccinations started becoming widespread. It then had 10,170 hospitalizations.

"Unfortunately, Dade and Broward County lead the nation in hospitalizations," Broward County Mayor Steve Geller said Monday. "The numbers are doubling every 10 or 11 days. Geometric progression. This is horrifying."

A law DeSantis signed in May gives him power to invalidate local emergency public health measures, including mask mandates and limitations on [business operations](#). It also bans any business or government entity from requiring proof of vaccination.



Alberto Gordon helps his daughter Alina, 3, try on a book bag during a bag and school supply give away at the office of Miami-Dade County Commissioner Joe Martinez, Friday, July 30, 2021, in Miami. Credit: AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee



Miami-Dade County Police officer Gina Hogen, right, gives a book bag and school supplies to Haley Hernandez, left, 3, and her grandmother Alicia Hernandez during a book bag give away at the office of county commissioner Joe Martinez, Friday, July 30, 2021, in Miami. Credit: AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee

The Broward district now says it will encourage, but not require, students

age 12 and older, as well as teachers and staff to get vaccinated. It will also encourage the use of facial coverings.

"Safety remains our highest priority," the district's statement said.

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