

Illinois requires educators, health workers to get vaccine

August 27 2021, by Sophia Tareen



An information sign is displayed at a department store in Rosemont, Ill., Thursday, Aug. 26, 2021. Gov. J.B. Pritzker of Illinois announced on Thursday a new, stricter set of coronavirus restrictions, ordering a statewide indoor mask mandate and requiring that all educators be vaccinated or face regular testing. Credit: AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh

Illinois health care workers and educators from kindergarten through college will be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 or submit to weekly testing, Gov. J.B. Pritzker said Thursday in announcing new safety protocols that also include a fresh statewide mandate for masks to be worn indoors.

The mandates, which overlap in several places with existing rules, are a response to a spike in COVID-19 infections fueled by the highly contagious delta variant, particularly in southern and central Illinois.

"Our current vaccination levels are not enough to blunt the ferocity of the delta variant hospitalization surges," Pritzker, a first-term Democrat, said at a Chicago news conference. "In some regions, hospital administrators are asking for more help to manage the sheer number of incoming patients who, I'll emphasize again, are almost exclusively individuals who have chosen not to have gotten the life-saving vaccine."

Pritzker said the requirements are designed to better protect more vulnerable populations, including young children who do not yet qualify for vaccines. Pritzker said that 98% of Illinois' COVID-19 infections from January to July were among the unvaccinated.

The mask order, which begins Monday, applies to everyone age 2 and older, regardless of vaccination status. It's similar to an order issued in May 2020, which was later relaxed for vaccinated people. First doses of the vaccine are required by Sept. 5 for [health care workers](#), including nursing home employees, K-12 educators and support staff and higher education teachers, staff and students. Those who don't comply will have to undergo weekly COVID-19 testing.



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Information signs are displayed at a grocery store in Mount Prospect, Ill., Thursday, Aug. 26, 2021. Gov. J.B. Pritzker of Illinois announced on Thursday a new, stricter set of coronavirus restrictions, ordering a statewide indoor mask mandate and requiring that all educators be vaccinated or face regular testing. Credit: AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh



In this Aug. 2, 2021, file photo, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker speaks at East Aurora High School in Aurora, Ill. Illinois health care workers and educators from kindergarten through college will be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19, Pritzker said Thursday, Aug. 26, 2021, in announcing new safety protocols that also include a fresh statewide mandate for masks to be worn indoors. Credit: Rich Hein/Chicago Sun-Times via AP, File

Other cities and states have made similar requirements. Earlier this month, California required all teachers and [school staff](#) to be [vaccinated or undergo weekly testing](#).

The surge in Illinois, with more than 4,400 cases reported Wednesday, has started overwhelming hospitals in less populated areas in the state where vaccination rates are low and there are fewer health care facilities.

For instance, in southern Illinois fewer than half of the residents are vaccinated and earlier this week there was only one available intensive care unit hospital bed available, according to state health officials.

In August, public health departments statewide have reported more than two dozen COVID-19 outbreaks at schools, according to Pritzker's office.

Illinois already has a mask requirement for all schools and two of the largest education systems, Chicago Public Schools and the University of Illinois, already require educator vaccinations. The U of I system also already requires student vaccinations. A large number of hospital systems have also required employee vaccines.

Teachers unions have voiced support of the vaccine and masking rules, but some schools have failed to enforce them and there have been complaints from some private schools and conservative lawmakers.

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