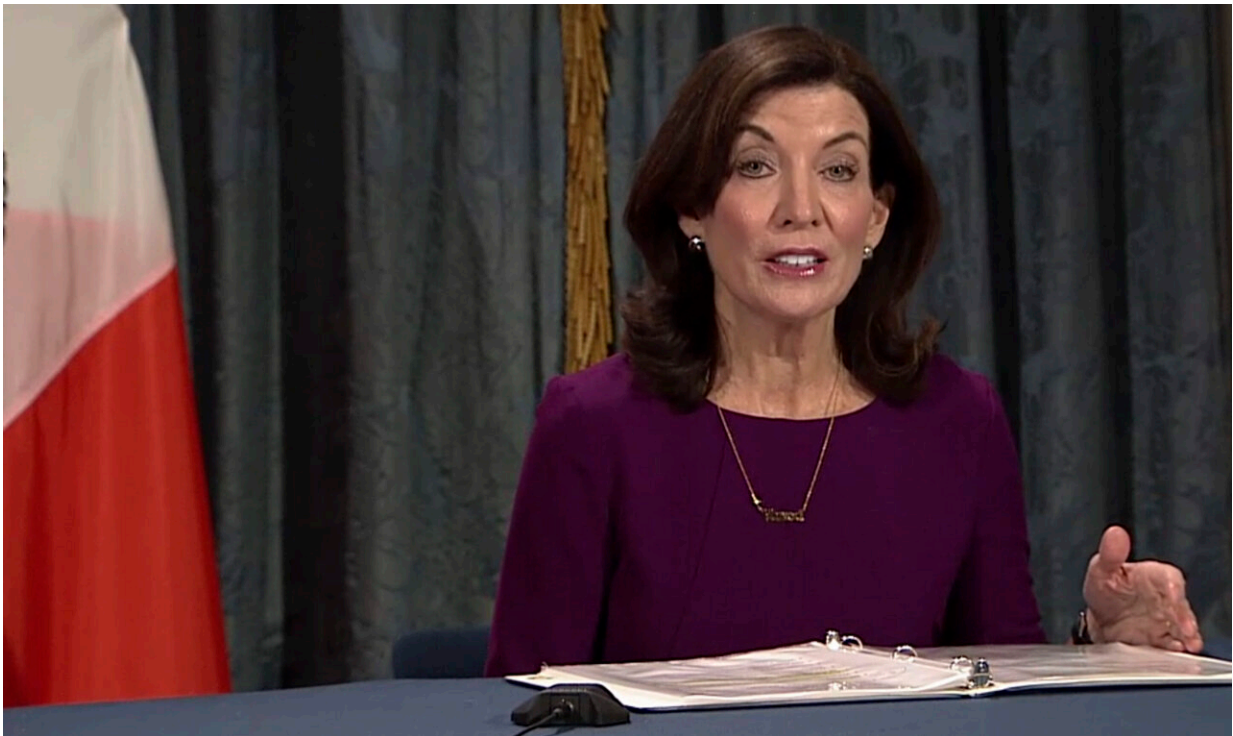


New York's COVID surge is back—and so is its mask mandate

December 10 2021, by Karen Matthews and Marina Villeneuve



In this image taken from video, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul speaks during a virtual press conference, Thursday, Dec. 2, 2021, in New York. Multiple cases of the omicron coronavirus variant have been detected in New York, health officials said Thursday, including a man who attended an anime convention in Manhattan in late November and tested positive for the variant when he returned home to Minnesota. Credit: AP Photo

Facing a winter surge in COVID-19 infections, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul announced Friday that masks will be required in all indoor public places unless the businesses or venues implement a vaccine requirement.

Hochul said the decision to reinstitute a mask mandate was based on the rising number of cases and hospitalizations, which have been especially pronounced in parts of upstate New York.

New York enacted a mask mandate at the beginning of the pandemic in April 2020 that lasted more than a year. The new mask mandate applies to both patrons and staff and will be in effect from Monday to Jan. 15, after which the state will reevaluate.

"We're entering a time of uncertainty and we could either plateau here or our cases could get out of control," Hochul warned at a public appearance in New York City.

New York joins several states with similar indoor mask mandates, including Washington, Oregon, Illinois, New Mexico, Nevada and Hawaii.

The state recorded more than 68,000 positive tests for the virus in the seven-day period that ended Wednesday. That's the most in any seven-day stretch since the start of February. The surge is especially pronounced in some areas of upstate New York, which has accounted for nearly three-fourths of confirmed COVID-19 deaths in hospitals since August.

"We are heading upward in a direction that I no longer find sustainable," Hochul said.

Hochul announced the mask mandate at a social service agency in on the west side of Manhattan, where most people already wear masks. New

York City requires vaccinations for indoor restaurant dining, entertainment and gyms, so those venues will be unaffected by the new rule.

Several upstate New York counties have recently enacted mask mandates as well, including Erie County, which includes Buffalo.

Though supported by many, mask mandates also have become a hot-button issue. Republican elected officials reacting to Hochul's announcement called it an unnecessary burden on businesses.

"This newest mask mandate is government overreach at its worst," said Republican Assemblyman Mike Lawler of suburban Rockland County. "Across New York state, we are getting shots in arms and our vaccination rate is one of the highest in the nation."

Hochul said violators could face civil and criminal penalties, including a maximum fine of \$1,000. Local health departments will be in charge of enforcing the requirements.

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