

California won't require COVID vaccine to attend schools

February 4 2023, by Adam Beam



Johnny Thai, 11, receives the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at a pediatric vaccine clinic for children ages 5 to 11 set up at Willard Intermediate School in Santa Ana, Calif., Nov. 9, 2021. On Friday, Feb. 3, 2023, the California Department of Public Health said it was no longer exploring emergency rules to add the COVID-19 vaccine to the list of required school vaccinations. Credit: AP Photo/Jae C. Hong,File

Children in California won't have to get the coronavirus vaccine to attend schools, state public health officials confirmed Friday, ending one of the last major restrictions of the pandemic in the nation's most populous state.

Gov. Gavin Newsom first announced the policy in 2021, saying it would eventually apply to all of California's 6.7 million public and private schoolchildren.

But since then, the crisis first caused by a mysterious virus in late 2019 has mostly receded from public consciousness. COVID-19 is still widespread, but the availability of multiple vaccines has lessened the viruses' effects for many—offering relief to what had been an overwhelmed public health system.

Nearly all of the pandemic restrictions put in place by Newsom have been lifted, and he won't be able to issue any new ones after Feb. 28 when the state's coronavirus emergency declaration officially ends.

One of the last remaining questions was what would happen to the state's vaccine mandate for schoolchildren, a [policy](#) that came from the California Department of Public Health and was not impacted by the lifting of the emergency declaration.

Friday, the Department of Public Health confirmed it was backing off its original plan.

"CDPH is not currently exploring emergency rulemaking to add COVID-19 to the list of required school vaccinations, but we continue to strongly recommend COVID-19 immunization for students and staff to keep everyone safer in the classroom," the department said in a statement. "Any changes to required K-12 immunizations are properly addressed through the legislative process."

The announcement was welcome news for Jonathan Zachreson, a father of three who lives in Roseville. Zachreson founded the group Reopen California Schools to oppose many of the state's coronavirus policies. His activism led to him being elected to the Roseville City School District board in November.

"This is long overdue. ... A lot of families have been stressed from this decision and worried about it for quite some time," he said. "I wish CDPH would make a bigger statement publicly or Newsom would make a public statement ... to let families know and [school](#) districts know that this is no longer going to be an issue for them."

Representatives for Newsom did not respond to an email requesting comment.

California has had lots of influence over the country's pandemic policies. It was the first state to issue a statewide stay-at-home order—and other states were swift to follow.

But most states did not follow California's lead when it came to the [vaccine mandate](#) for [public schools](#). Officials in Louisiana announced a similar mandate, but later backed off. Schools in the District of Columbia plan to require the COVID-19 vaccine starting in the fall.

Republican U.S. Rep. Kevin Kiley, a former member of the state Assembly who challenged Newsom in a failed recall attempt in 2021 over his pandemic policies, published a blog post declaring: "We won. To Gavin Newsom: You lost."

Kevin Gordon, a lobbyist representing most of the state's [school districts](#), said he did not think the [policy change](#) was the result of political pressure by Republicans, but instead a reflection of the virus's slowing transmission rates.

"The public's appetite for these kinds of mandates is definitely not what it used to be," he said. "If you started to now impose a heavy mandate when the amount of transmission is significantly lower than it was statewide, a one-size-fits-all solution doesn't work right now."

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