

Illinois On Track To Lift All COVID-19 Restrictions

by Kevin Bessler
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(The Center Square) – Illinois is inching closer to a full reopening free of COVID-19 restrictions.

The state is set to enter Phase 5 of its reopening plan on June 11.

In the final phase, conventions, festivals and large events can take place, and all sectors so the economy, including bars and restaurants, can return to normal operations. The problem for many has been finding workers.

At a news conference Wednesday in Peoria, Gov. J.B Pritzker said there are 3 main reasons why Illinoisans are not going back to work. He said some people are staying away because they are afraid of getting COVID-19 in the workplace, despite three effective vaccines readily available. He also said there is a lack of childcare and few good-paying jobs.

“I think that there may be people who are on unemployment right now and aren’t able to find a job that pays enough to pay their bills,” said Pritzker.

Twenty-five states, including neighboring Missouri, Indiana and Iowa, have discontinued the enhanced federal unemployment benefits in an effort to get people off the sidelines and back into the workforce. Pritzker has said Illinois would not be joining the movement.

For the second straight day, there were fewer than 500 new coronavirus cases in Illinois. From May 25 to 31, the percentage of COVID-19 tests coming back positive was 1.6%. The governor says the state is nearly 70% vaccinated, but may add another incentive to get more people to get a shot.

“Free tickets for people who want to go to Six Flags Great America, we have now a beer and a shot, and lots of other incentives coming including potentially a vaccine lottery,” Pritzker said.

Businesses serving alcohol can now offer a free drink to vaccinated patrons under a new law signed by the governor Wednesday.

The vaccine lottery is gaining momentum nationwide. Ohio was the first state to conduct a vaccination lottery, giving away \$1 million jackpots to entice those unsure about the vaccine. It worked. First-time shots jumped nearly 40% after the lottery announcement. The money was paid out of federal coronavirus relief funds.

Now New Mexico has set the vaccination lottery standard by offering a total of \$10 million in prize money, including a \$5 million grand prize.