

# Pritzker Says Illinois Could See More COVID-19 Shutdowns

by Patrick Andriesen  
July 26 2021 1:19 PM



SPRINGFIELD - A [new round](#) of pandemic shutdowns could happen in Illinois as neighboring states report a rapid resurgence in COVID-19 cases, Gov. J.B. Pritzker said July 19 as he announced his reelection bid.

While Pritzker insisted Illinois was a long way from reinstituting those restrictions, he said new mitigations policies would look different than what he ordered in spring 2020. That includes reassessing pandemic policies that favored big-box grocery stores and retailers as thousands of Illinois' small businesses were forced to close their doors.

“When you walk into a Walmart, in addition to there being a grocery store, there's also other things that you could buy. And so I think, certainly in retrospect now, I think what we would say is, ‘If you could have kept the capacity limit appropriate in a smaller venue, it might have kept that open,’” Pritzker said.

Admitting to that mistake comes months too late for the [39%](#) of Illinois businesses that never reopened when the state lifted COVID-19 mitigations in June. The casualty list includes more than half of the state's food, accommodation, and hospitality and leisure small businesses lost since January 2020.

“But we were following, in a very unknown environment, with a new coronavirus – the federal government was essentially saying to us, ‘You need to keep these things open and you need to close the other things,’” Pritzker said.

Retailers were not the only businesses to see uneven treatment or on-again, off-again restrictions. [Dave Halpern](#), who co-founded a group of bars as 4 Entertainment Group in Glenview, Illinois, said a lot of sleepless nights led to his businesses' survival.

“Our industry has been treated as a scapegoat,” Halpern said. “There was no science that suggested that bars and restaurants that were following safe distancing and mask mandates were more dangerous than family gatherings or house parties with no restrictions.”

Pritzker said the state is reconsidering shutdown policies as the nation again sees COVID-19 infection rates and hospitalizations on the rise. Pritzker's primary concern is for Illinois counties neighboring Missouri, which reported a state positivity rate of [17.43%](#) on July 20.

“Missouri is... the worst state in the nation right now,” Pritzker said. “And it's right on our border. And (COVID-19) is pouring over, unfortunately, across the border into Metro East and southern Illinois.”

As Pritzker eyes potential mitigations for counties on the state border, Republican governors in states such as Florida are explicitly [ruling out](#) another round of coronavirus closures. Pritzker argues Illinois' top-down strategy provides a more measured approach.

“There were people last summer who thought we should rule out, you know, additional mitigation... and you saw what happened in October, November, December. I mean it was worse than it was in April and May.”

Pritzker’s reevaluation of the state restrictions he implemented during the pandemic came after announcing his bid for re-election in the Nov. 8, 2022, general election.

Several potential Republican [challengers](#) for governor have made it clear Illinois’ handling of the novel coronavirus and continued mitigations will be a central issue in the upcoming election. In particular, the impact those policies had on residents and the state’s fiscal health.

More than a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, [unemployment](#) in Illinois continues to trail the national average at 7.2%. The state has recovered just half of the more than 800,000 jobs lost since the onset of the coronavirus.

Consequently, Illinois has led the Midwest as the worst state for job growth since the recovery began.

Pritzker compounded on the plight of Illinois’ unemployed after [twice passing](#) Illinois’ 2022 state budget that includes four of the governor’s nine new taxes and fees, totaling \$655 million and targeting job creators. The Illinois Policy Institute’s chief economist, Orphe Divounguy, predicted these taxes will reduce investment and hurt job creation efforts by removing key tax incentives and deductions.

“As Illinois businesses take an important step forward by being allowed to reopen, cash-strapped business taxpayers face higher taxes. Those taxes will make it harder to raise wages or invest and bring back workers,” Divounguy said.

“The new taxes in the budget – the treatment of net operating losses and rolling back bonus depreciation – will raise the pretax return businesses require to pursue investment opportunities, reducing the number of projects they’ll find worthwhile. By raising the cost of investment, we’re shrinking the number of available opportunities for over 400,000 job seekers.”

Pritzker has reassured Illinoisans that a new round of COVID-19 shutdowns are a long way away for the state. Still, the lessons of the pandemic and Pritzker’s top-down, one-size-fit-all policies have yet to be fully learned by the sitting governor.