

# **Pritzker, Ezike, Announce COVID Vaccine Requirement For Healthcare Workers, Pre-K-12 Teachers/Staff, Higher Education Personnel**

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**CHICAGO** – As COVID-19 infection and hospitalization rates across the state continue



to increase, particularly in downstate communities with the lowest vaccination rates, Governor JB Pritzker and IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike today announced vaccination requirements for individuals in high risk settings. All healthcare workers, including nursing home employees, all pre-k-12 teachers and staff, as well as higher education personnel and students will now be required to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Employees in all of these settings and higher education students who are unable or unwilling to receive the vaccine will be required to get tested for COVID-19 at least once per week, and DPH and ISBE may require increased testing in certain situations.

The Governor and Dr. Ezike also announced a statewide indoor mask mandate for all Illinois residents, regardless of vaccination status, as COVID-19 cases and hospitalization rates continue to increase. The masking requirements are effective Monday, August 30th.

The public health requirements come as regions with low vaccination rates continue to see a surge of COVID-19 hospitalizations. In IDPH region 5, Southern Illinois, with the lowest vaccination rate in the state at 44 percent, only 3% of ICU beds are available as the region experiences the highest case rate in the state. Since August 1st, local health departments across the state have reported 27 COVID-19 outbreaks at schools and currently hundreds of schools are being monitored for potential COVID-19 exposures.

“The quick spread of this disease in Illinois and across the country is holding us all back from the post-pandemic life we so desperately want to embrace, and it’s harming the most vulnerable among us,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “We are running out of time as our hospitals run out of beds. Vaccination remains our strongest tool to protect ourselves and our loved ones, to restore post-pandemic life to our communities, and most crucially, to maintain our healthcare system’s ability to care for anyone who walks through their doors in need of help – and Illinois is taking action to keep our communities safe.”

“Unlike the wave of COVID-19 we saw earlier this Spring, we’re now seeing our hospital resources stretched thin with some areas of Illinois reduced to only a handful of available ICU beds,” said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. “The vast majority of hospitalizations, as well as cases and deaths, are among those who are unvaccinated. This has become a pandemic of the unvaccinated. We have safe, proven, and effective tools to turn the tide and end this pandemic. But until more people are vaccinated, masks are the order of the day and will help us slow the spread of the virus.”

## **COVID-19 Vaccination**

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pritzker administration has implemented policies and guidelines in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC) to slow the spread of the virus and protect the health and safety of residents. With the Delta variant causing a rapid increase in infection rates across the state and nation and downstate hospitals in Illinois approaching capacity for hospital and ICU beds, employees in high risk settings will now be required to receive the vaccine or be subject to routine testing. Earlier this month, the administration announced that employees at all State-run congregate facilities would be required to be vaccinated.

To lower the number of breakthrough cases that require hospital admission, the majority of whom are 65 and over or immunocompromised, all healthcare workers, including workers at public and private nursing homes, must get vaccinated. Teachers and staff at pre-k-12 schools as well as personnel and students at higher education institutions are required to receive the vaccine. Workers and students in applicable settings must receive the first dose of a two-dose vaccination series or a single-dose vaccination by September 5, 2021. Second doses of the vaccine must be received by 30 days after the first dose.

Workers who do not receive the vaccine or those who opt out for medical reasons or based on a sincerely held religious belief must follow a routine testing schedule to detect cases early and prevent further spread. Testing will be required a minimum of once per week in schools and healthcare facilities. The frequency of testing may be required to increase in the event of positive cases.

Healthcare, school workers, and higher education personnel and students attending in-person classes who do not provide proof of vaccination will be prevented from entering healthcare and educational facilities unless they follow the required testing protocol.

The COVID-19 vaccine has been available for healthcare and nursing home workers since December 15, 2020, and open to teachers since January 25, 2021. To increase ease of access for all residents, the Pritzker administration established 25 mass vaccination sites across the state that were run by members of the Illinois National Guard (ILNG) who administered 1,869,755 shots to residents across the state. Additionally, teams of ILNG members supported over 800 mobile vaccination clinics across the state on top of an additional 1,705 state-supported mobile sites that focused on communities hardest hit by the pandemic, young residents, and rural communities.

The administration also launched vaccination clinics in communities experiencing high case rates. Clinics were set up in central locations within communities including schools and houses of worship and were also present at community events and, most recently, the Illinois State Fair and upcoming Du Quoin Fair.

Building on these efforts to make access to the COVID-19 vaccine equitable and easy, the administration has offered support to every school district in the State in the form of free mobile vaccination events. So far, the administration has hosted 138 school-focused event with another 163 scheduled for the coming days and weeks.

