

Pritzker Mandates Vaccines for Educators, Hospital Staff; Masks for Everyone Indoors

by Greg Bishop

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(The Center Square) – Most everyone in Illinois schools, including college students, must to get vaccinated or be regularly tested for COVID-19, Gov. J.B. Pritzker's mandated Thursday in his latest executive order.

The governor also said masks will be required indoors statewide Monday.

Now a year-and-a-half into the pandemic, and nearly four months since vaccines have been widely available, Pritzker issued another mask mandate and ordered health care workers, school staff from preschool to college, and college students, to get vaccinated.

“Effective Sept. 5, individuals working in these settings who are unable or unwilling to receive their first dose of vaccine will be required to get tested for COVID-19 at least once a week and may require more frequent testing in certain situations, like in an outbreak.”

Beginning Monday, masks will be required in all places for people older than 2 years old “regardless of vaccination status,” the governor said.

“Masks work, period,” Pritzker said.

The Pritzker administration says the efforts are to limit strain on hospitals. IDPH referred to a website from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention titled “Science Brief: Community Use of Cloth Masks to Control the Spread of SARS-CoV-2.”

The Illinois Retail Merchants Association said it supported the announcement. The retail group said it’s a measured approach to ensure shoppers have access to needed goods and keep workplaces safe. The Illinois Manufacturers' Association said it supports vaccines and mask-wearing to protect communities toward restoring the economy.

State Rep. Avery Bourne, R-Raymond, found out about the governor’s order from news reports before the announcement, not the governor’s office. She said some of these mandates must be reached through collective bargaining at the local level.

Pritzker said he’s working with unions to implement the mandate.

In a letter to the governor before the announcement, Illinois House Minority Leader Jim Durkin, R-Western Springs, was confused by a phone call he got from the governor Wednesday night about the announcement while the governor’s political advertisements tout success in the pandemic.

“That is why your phone call last night asking for suggestions on how to get this new wave of the pandemic under control was so unexpected,” Durkin wrote. “I would apologize for thinking you were being insincere with that call asking my advice, but immediately after hanging up, I received a breaking news update from the Chicago Sun-Times that you had, once again, laid out your plan without input.”

Bourne said the governor’s go-it-alone approach is divisive.

“But Governor Pritzker issuing a statewide mandate actually I think hurts those conversations, makes this more political, takes away these important conversations, which hurts our purpose,” Bourne said.

The governor said he's open to hearing from lawmakers from both parties. Durkin said the governor should call a special session of both chambers to address the issues, immediately.

"I'm always open to hearing formal input from the legislature and I think that he should go and do whatever he wants to do," Pritzker said. "They're a co-equal branch of government."

House Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch's office said it supports the governor's efforts. Senate President Don Harmon's office didn't immediately respond.

Both chambers are back Aug. 31 to take up redrawn legislative maps.

The Joint Committee on Administrative Rules which could take up the mask mandate for businesses meets on Sept. 14.

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