

Gov. Pritzker Extends Vaccine Deadline At Request Of Hospital And School Leaders

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SPRINGFIELD – As hospitals and schools work to implement additional COVID-19 testing programs and accountability measures, Governor JB Pritzker and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike today announced a two-week extension of vaccination requirements for individuals in high-risk settings.

All healthcare workers, including nursing home employees, all P-12 teachers, and staff, as well as higher education personnel and students, will now be required to receive an initial dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by September 19, 2021. The extended deadline came at the request of the Illinois Health and Hospital Association (IHA), as well as education leaders including the Illinois Education Association (IEA), Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT), Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA), and Illinois Principals Association (IPA), who best understand the localized needs of hospitals and schools implementing their own testing, vaccine and accountability protocols.

Entities continue to be permitted and encouraged to put in place more stringent vaccination requirements. The Executive Order does not prohibit any entity from implementing a requirement that personnel, contractors, students, or other visitors be fully vaccinated without providing the alternative to test on a weekly basis consistent with applicable law.

“Vaccines remain our strongest tool to protect ourselves from COVID-19, the Delta variant, and most crucially, to maintain our healthcare system’s ability to care for anyone who walks through their doors in need of help,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “While hospitals and schools move forward in good faith, this extension ensures they are prepared to meet this requirement to better protect our most vulnerable residents and children who are not yet eligible to get vaccinated.”

“Even as our hospitals and schools are taking the necessary steps to ensure compliance with the testing and accountability measures mandated in Executive Order 2021-22, we recognize that some institutions will need additional time in which to establish procedures that will guarantee they are compliant,” said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike. “Our primary goal is to make sure that healthcare workers, education employees, and students are protected, along with their families and communities, and this extension will help us achieve that goal.”

To combat the more contagious Delta variant, on August 26, 2021, the Governor announced that all healthcare workers, P-12 teachers and staff, higher education personnel, and students would be required to receive the COVID-19 vaccine or submit to regular testing requirements. With Executive Order 2021-22, workers and students in

applicable settings must receive the first dose of a two-dose vaccination series or a single-dose vaccination by September 19, 2021. The two-week extension will allow for more schools and hospitals to implement the new accountability measures. The second dose of either two-dose vaccine must be received by 30 days after the first dose, as directed by vaccine providers.

"I deeply appreciate how hard schools are working to protect students and educators while offering the highest quality in-person learning experience," said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala. "Our school leaders said they needed more time to plan and communicate, and I thank Gov. Pritzker and Dr. Ezike for providing this extension. While testing is an option for all school personnel, vaccination is the safest and most effective defense against COVID-19. I encourage everyone who works with our students to use this extra time to get vaccinated."

The extension will also allow for more time to put additional testing protocols in place, given that individuals who are unable or unwilling to receive the vaccine are required to get tested for COVID-19 at least once per week to prevent further spread. IDPH and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) may require increased testing in the event of positive cases. Healthcare professionals, school workers, and higher education personnel, and students who do not provide proof of vaccination will be required to follow the testing protocol in order to enter healthcare and educational facilities.

"The Illinois Health and Hospital Association applauds Governor Pritzker's extension to the deadline by which the testing requirement must be implemented," said IHA President & CEO A.J. Wilhelmi. "We share the Governor's goal of vaccinating healthcare workers against COVID-19 to protect themselves, their families, patients, and communities against severe disease, long-term health consequences, and possible death. Hospitals continue to be on the frontlines fighting the pandemic during this latest surge of the virus, while simultaneously continuing to make progress in vaccinating healthcare workers. The Governor's welcome announcement will grant hospitals additional time to meet the testing requirement."

"Today's announcement of the two-week deadline extension on the governor's Executive Order on vaccines is welcome news," said Illinois Education Association President Kathi Griffin. "We have said all along that the best place for students to be is in the classroom, as long as it's safe. We believe the governor's executive order – which encourages all education employees from preschool through college to be vaccinated and if they can't, or won't, then to be tested weekly – will help keep schools open and all those who work and learn inside them safe."

"We welcome today's extension from Governor Pritzker. It is an important step that will help educators and school staff work with management to comply with the vaccine

mandate,” said Illinois Federation of Teachers President Dan Montgomery. “To be clear, we believe that the best place for students to learn is in the classroom, and that can best be accomplished by following the science and public health guidelines and getting everyone vaccinated who can be vaccinated. We continue to work toward that goal.”

“To give school districts more time to logistically prepare for full implementation of a COVID-19 vaccination and testing program, we appreciate the Governor postponing the timeline by two weeks,” said Illinois Association of School Administrators Executive Director Dr. Brent Clark.

“With the increased risks posed to young people by the COVID-19 Delta variant, the IPA recognizes the critical role vaccinations and testing play for young people to remain in-person at school and stay healthy while doing so,” said Illinois Principals Association Executive Director Dr. Jason Leahy. “Additionally, we appreciate the Governor’s recognition of the time needed for school leaders, teachers, and staff to set up the systems needed for these new requirements.”

As of today, 8.4 million Illinoisans (66.2%) have received at least one dose of the vaccine, and 6.5 million are fully vaccinated (51.4%). Illinois continues to be a leader in the Midwest in vaccinating its residents, with 61% of children between the ages of 12 and 17, 78.7% of adults, and 93.7% of seniors vaccinated to date.

From the onset of the 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 all residents. Building on efforts to make access to the COVID-19 vaccine equitable and accessible for frontline workers, the vaccine has been available for healthcare and nursing home workers since December 15, 2020, and open to teachers since January 25, 2021. In August, the administration announced that employees at all state-run congregate facilities would be required to be vaccinated. As of Monday, August 30, a statewide indoor mask mandate went into effect for all Illinois residents, regardless of vaccination status, as COVID-19 cases and hospitalization rates continue to increase.

Vaccines remain critical to keeping communities safe and ending the pandemic. All Illinois residents over the age of 12 are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at no cost and proof of immigration status is not required to receive the vaccine. To find a vaccination center near you, visit vaccines.gov.