Governor Pritzker Adjusts COVID-19 Requirements to Address Current Needs

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CHICAGO - As part of his continuing plan to carefully unwind the state's COVID-19 executive orders, Governor Pritzker today updated testing requirements for school and childcare personnel, rescinding the requirement that unvaccinated employees in these sectors test twice weekly. This change goes into effect Friday and is made on the advice of medical experts, based on their careful consideration of the current conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and is in line with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance.



“Vaccination continues to be the most effective tool we have against COVID-19, and I’m proud that millions of Illinoisans have taken advantage of these life-saving vaccines – they have given us the ability to adjust these requirements,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “I continue to urge everyone in the state to stay up to date on vaccines and boosters, including getting the recently released bivalent booster shot. Although the current state of the pandemic is very different than it was two years ago, we still need to protect the most vulnerable members of our community as we continue to be responsive to the changing challenges and evolutions of this virus.”

“As our approach to the pandemic continues to evolve, we are easing some COVID-19 restrictions in our schools and daycare centers,” said Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Dr. Sameer Vohra. “It remains our continued goal to address the health risks of COVID-19, but current conditions of the pandemic are different from those of the last two years. There are now many tools available for protecting our students, teachers and the general public, including the latest updated bivalent vaccines and effective treatment options for children and adults. It continues to be important to remain home if you have COVID-19 symptoms, per CDC recommendations. Broad access to COVID-19 testing will remain a critical part of our strategy. To ensure ready access to testing, IDPH has offered one million rapid COVID-19 tests to schools for use by students and staff at home.”

The CDC no longer requires routine testing in schools or childcare settings regardless of the vaccination status of the staff member. However, they continue to recommend schools and other congregate educational settings consider instituting testing at times of high risk in the community, such as upon return from breaks or after large indoor events. Illinois schools and childcare centers are urged to consider these suggestions when planning testing and prevention strategies.

Free and accessible testing options are widely available to school staff. IDPH made 1 million free rapid tests available to schools earlier this year. 160 school districts have opted into the SHIELD testing program, performing regular surveillance testing for schools at no cost to the district. Almost 50,000 tests have been performed by SHIELD since the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year.

Vaccines continue to be the strongest protection against COVID-19 for all ages. Students, teachers, and staff are all strongly encouraged to stay up to date on vaccines and boosters to prevent serious illness and even death. Information on finding vaccines and booster shots can be found at www.vaccines.gov.

“We have said all along that we should be following the science. Unlike earlier in the pandemic, we now have vaccines, vaccines to combat the newest variants, treatments and our hospitals are no longer overloaded,” said Illinois Education Association

President Kathi Griffin. “Because of all of this, we agree with the governor’s decision to lift the vaccine or test mandate. The safety of students, and all those who work with them in our schools across the state, has always been our number one concern. We are glad to see so many smiling faces as we begin the 2022-23 school year.”

“Throughout the pandemic, Governor Pritzker has made the tough decisions necessary to keep all Illinoisans healthy and safe,” said Illinois Federation of Teachers President Dan Montgomery. “By extending the emergency proclamation and eliminating the “vaccine or test” mandate, he is continuing to prioritize safety while ensuring our state adapts to changing circumstances and continues down the road to recovery.”

“Educators across Illinois have spent the past two years prioritizing students’ learning and well-being. Their dedication brought students safely back to the classroom,” said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala. “With the knowledge and insights we have gained about COVID-19 and how to prevent its spread, Illinois can now safely lift the requirement for school personnel to be vaccinated or tested weekly. We are so grateful to reach yet another milestone in pandemic recovery and thank all of our educators, administrators, and other school personnel for the vital role they continue to play in keeping our communities safe.”