

# Gov. Pritzker Hails Health Care Heroes As State Ends COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

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**SPRINGFIELD** — As the state of Illinois and the nation reach a major milestone and end the COVID-related Public Health Emergency (PHE) declarations that have been in place since the beginning of the pandemic, Governor JB Pritzker today declared May 11 “Illinois Public Health & Health Care Hero Day.” The Governor formally issued the

proclamation at a worker appreciation event at the Sangamon County Health Department in Springfield alongside the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Dr. Sameer Vohra and other leaders of the state's public health and healthcare community.

“With the heroic efforts of our healthcare workers and institutions, the perseverance and grit of the people of Illinois, and with 26 million vaccine doses administered, I couldn't be happier to announce today that all national and state COVID-19 related emergency declarations have finally come to an end,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “Although today marks the official end of our state's emergency declarations, we are taking this moment to ensure that we learn lessons from the pandemic experience so we can prepare for the future and save lives in the years ahead. And we are especially grateful to our healthcare heroes who made this milestone possible. We owe them our everlasting respect and gratitude, and so many of us owe them our lives.”

“Our public health and health care workers are first in our hearts for their dedication and the support that they provide to others while doing their job day in and day out,” **said Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton**. “Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, they sacrificed and served to keep Illinois residents safe. Healthcare is core to all our lives, and it is the people who provide it that work hard to ensure we can live and be well. They are truly our heroes.”

Governor Pritzker aligned the conclusion of the state's disaster proclamation with the conclusion of the federal government's COVID-19 public health emergency, to ensure enhanced federal benefits in SNAP and Medicaid remained in place for vulnerable families for as long as possible.

Since March of 2020, state and local partners benefitted from a disaster proclamation in the following ways:

- Federal reimbursement for state response costs.
- Illinois residents were able to collect additional SNAP benefits, more than 1.4 million children received Pandemic EBT (nutrition) support, and Medicaid expansion ensured access to telehealth options and the resources Illinoisans needed to stay healthy.
- Use of State Disaster Relief Fund, covering direct state costs and reimbursements to Illinois National Guard and mutual aid groups.
- Use of the state's mutual aid network, groups of public safety response professionals — including hundreds of health care providers and management professionals, law enforcement officers, fire fighters, emergency medical technicians and disaster response professionals — that are available to deploy to areas of shortage.

- Authorizing the Governor to activate Illinois National Guard reservists, some of whom were doctors and nurses and served on the front lines of the pandemic response.
- Allowing expedited procurement should it be necessary.
- Authorizing additional executive actions as needed to protect public health and safety

The Governor issued the initial emergency proclamation on March 9, 2020 as the state and nation were bracing for an unprecedented, global public health emergency. The pandemic went on to last more than three years, causing more than 4 million COVID-19 cases and 36,000 deaths in Illinois. With case rates remaining at low levels in recent months, including last week's announcement that [no Illinois counties are at an elevated community level for COVID-19](#), the tools provided by the PHE are no longer necessary to fight the virus.

“It is fitting today as we formally end the Public Health Emergency that we pause to reflect on the truly heroic efforts of the thousands of public health workers, including those at IDPH and in our local health departments, as well as the healthcare workers in our hospitals and clinics,” **said Dr. Vohra**. “Their bravery and fortitude in the face of this overwhelming public health crisis is a gift to cherish and appreciate. As we write the next chapters in the story of public health in Illinois, we look forward to their continued leadership and guidance to help address inequities and promote health throughout our great State.”

The proclamation, signed at the onset of the pandemic, leveraged federal funding and formalized emergency procedures by activating the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), bringing together decision-makers from every state agency and the state's highly qualified mutual aid network to deploy critical resources for healthcare staffing, testing, vaccinations, and therapeutics as necessary during the public health threat.

Officials were able to mobilize resources to conduct millions of COVID-19 tests throughout the state at community testing sites as well as through *Test to Stay* programs in schools and colleges, allowing children to remain safely in school. When vaccines became widely available in late 2021, Illinois launched a massive vaccination program that spanned across the state and has to date delivered more than 26 million doses.

Maintaining the PHE allowed for federal mandates covering healthcare costs to remain in place, supporting testing and other services that were critical during the recent winter surge. Funding also allowed for thousands of healthcare staff to be deployed to hospitals during staffing crises through state contracts.

The end of the PHE means the federal government is expected to phase out providing tests, vaccines, and treatment directly to states. However, these efforts will not end immediately, but over the coming months. The state of Illinois is continuing to offer at-home rapid tests to households in economically disadvantaged communities through June 30, through a partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation's [Project ACT](#).

With the national and state Public Health Emergencies for COVID-19 expiring on May 11, there will also be changes to data collection and reporting on the virus. After May 11, the CDC has announced it will stop tracking and reporting COVID-19 cases at the community level, as it has been doing since April 2022. Hospitals will no longer be required to report the number of COVID-19 patients in hospital beds or in the ICU or on ventilators. However, data on COVID-19 and the flu in Illinois will continue to be reported via the [Illinois Wastewater Surveillance System dashboard](#).

IDPH will continue to report general COVID-19 data and will also track a variety of other metrics to monitor disease spread and severity including lab data, genomic sequencing, and wastewater surveillance data.

Dr. Vohra stressed that even as the PHE is expiring, IDPH will remain focused on prevention and treatment of COVID-19 and will use lessons learned from the pandemic to address other public health challenges including chronic diseases, the opioid epidemic, and health disparities.

For those covered by the Medicaid program, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) has launched the [Ready to Renew](#) campaign to ensure that Illinoisans who are enrolled in Medicaid do not lose coverage due to the expiration of the automatic renewal provisions that were in place during the Public Health Emergency.

In Illinois, there will not be a “coverage cliff,” where everyone loses coverage at one time. Rather, redeterminations will happen on a rolling basis through mid-2024. HFS is reminding Medicaid customers to keep a close eye on their mailboxes for notices about when they need to take action to renew their coverage. For more information about Medicaid Renewals, click [HERE](#).

The U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) has announced it is launching the [HHS Bridge Access Program For COVID-19 Vaccines and Treatments](#) for those who are uninsured. The program will create a \$1.1 billion public-private partnership to help maintain uninsured individuals' access to COVID-19 care at their local pharmacies, through existing public health infrastructure, and at their local health centers.

Finally, services such as telemedicine through the [Test to Treat](#) program offered through the SIU School of Medicine is expected to continue into Spring of 2024 and address the Covid-19 treatment needs for all Illinois residents during the next respiratory season.

IDPH is encouraging local health department partners around the state to mark the end of the PHE by hosting events to thank their employees and encourage local residents to show their appreciation for public health and health care heroes.

For more information about IDPH resources and data, visit the department's [COVID-19 dashboard](#).