



# **NEWS RELEASE**

## **STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER**

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## **MDHHS extends epidemic order, strengthens mask requirement for children**

*Order expands mask requirement to children ages 2-4 as recommended by American Academy of Pediatrics*

**LANSING, MICH.** Today, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) extended its [Gatherings and Mask epidemic order](#). The Order – which preserves the strongest public health order in the Midwest – is designed to balance day-to-day activities while controlling the spread of COVID-19 and saving Michiganders' lives. It includes expansion of mask requirements to children ages 2 to 4 to further protect the state's residents.

Although progress has been made, it is crucial that Michiganders continue to mask up and socially distance as the state takes steps to get back to normal.

"Michigan has administered more than 5.5 million doses of the safe and effective COVID vaccines, but we've got more work to do," said Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. "Every day I'm fighting to get the tests, supplies, and personnel we need from the federal government to keep Michiganders safe, but we all need to do our part to slow the spread so we can protect our families and get back to normal sooner. That's why we're taking action today to extend and strengthen Michigan's public health protections, which are the strongest in the Midwest. I urge all Michiganders to mask up, maintain social distancing, get tested, and make your appointment to get vaccinated as soon as possible."

Expanding the mask rule to children ages 2 to 4 requires a good faith effort to ensure that these children wear masks while in gatherings at childcare facilities or camps. It takes effect April 26, 2021. This addresses the increase in cases among younger Michiganders and follows recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance.

"Michigan continues to implement smart health policies and mitigation measures to fight the spread of COVID-19," said Elizabeth Hertel, MDHHS director. "This includes the requirement to wear a mask while in public and at gatherings, limits on indoor residential social gatherings larger than 15 people with no more than three households, and expanded testing requirements for youth sports. Additionally, the most important thing people can do right now is to get the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine to protect themselves and their families, and help us eliminate this virus once and for all."

As of today, 29.5% of Michigan residents 16 and older had been fully vaccinated for COVID-19 and 44% had received at least a first dose.

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"More than 5.5 million doses of the safe and effective COVID vaccines have been administered in Michigan, and we are well on our way to vaccinating at least 70% of Michiganders ages 16 and up," said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health at MDHHS. "However, I continue to be incredibly concerned about our state's COVID-19 data. We are still very much fighting this pandemic and seeing concerning trends in new cases and hospitalizations. Michiganders need to be using every tool in our toolbox right now to get these cases and hospitalizations down. Just because something is open and legal does not mean you should be doing it. We all must continue doing what works to slow the spread of the disease by wearing masks, washing our hands, avoiding crowds and indoor gatherings, and making plans to get the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible."

MDHHS had been closely [monitoring three metrics](#) for stabilization or declines over the past several weeks. Michigan's metrics have been increasing for the past few weeks, although the rate of increase is declining. The presence of more infectious variants, such as the B.1.1.7 variant, threatens progress in control of the epidemic and MDHHS will be monitoring data closely. In recent days:

- Positivity rate: had increased for eight weeks but has seen a recent 5-day decline to 17.1%. However, this metric remains up 390% from the mid-February low and remains above the December peak of 14.4%.
- Statewide case rate: This metric has increased over the past eight weeks to 613.9 cases per million. The rate is more than 475% higher than the low in mid-February but remains below peak of 737.8 cases per million on Saturday, Nov 14.
- Hospital capacity: The percent of inpatient beds dedicated to those with COVID-19 is now at 18.8%. This metric peaked at 19.6% on Tuesday, Dec. 4, and is up 373% from the February low.

"Nurses are exhausted. Many hospitals are close to 100% capacity. RNs around the state are being put in the impossible situation of having to decide which patient to attend to. Nurses are working up to 18 hours at a time, often without breaks," said Jamie Brown, president of the Michigan Nurses Association. "We are begging for everyone in the community to do their part. Stay home. Wear a mask. Get a vaccine when you are able. We are barely able to keep our heads above water. We are in crisis. We need our communities' help."

"We know that wearing a mask significantly reduces the spread of infection and should be part of the comprehensive strategy to reduce COVID-19—including for children age 2 and up," said Michigan Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MIAAP) President Dr. Matthew Hornik. "Use of masks does not restrict oxygen in the lungs even in children, it is recommended to wear a mask with layers to filter droplets effectively."

The order extension is through May 24. An [infographic that highlights order requirements can be found on Michigan's COVID-19 website](#).

Information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at [Michigan.gov/Coronavirus](https://www.michigan.gov/Coronavirus) and [CDC.gov/Coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/Coronavirus). To learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine, visit [Michigan.gov/COVIDVaccine](https://www.michigan.gov/COVIDVaccine).

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