COVID-19 Vaccine (https://mn.gov/covid19/vaccine/find-vaccine/locations/index.jsp) – Find out when, where, and how to get your shot.

Vaccine Rewards (https://mn.gov/covid19/vaccine-rewards/index.jsp) – Your shot to a safe summer. Claim your reward by June 30.

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As COVID-19 Situation Improves, Governor Walz Loosens Restrictions

Governor urges Minnesotans to protect progress made over the past month

January 6, 2021

[ST. PAUL, MN] – As the COVID-19 situation improves by nearly every metric across Minnesota, Governor Tim Walz today announced measures that loosen restrictions on important parts of daily life. The Governor also urged Minnesotans to protect the progress made over the past month.

"The situation in Minnesota is undeniably better than it was last month," Governor Walz said. **"We have reasons to be optimistic, and Minnesotans' sacrifice and commitment to their communities helped change the pandemic's trajectory and saved lives. But we need to protect the progress we've made."**

The announcement comes as tens of thousands of Minnesotans have received their first dose of the vaccine, COVID-19 cases are down, hospital bed use is declining, and kids are heading back to the classroom.

"As we cautiously adjust the dials to help Minnesotans return to important elements of their daily lives, we continue to monitor where we stand ," Governor Walz continued. " **Two months ago the pandemic quickly snowballed from manageable to out-of-control. For our students, our small businesses, and public health, we cannot allow that to happen again** ."

Today, COVID-19 is spreading more slowly across Minnesota than two months ago. Recognizing our progress – but understanding we need to remain cautious – the Governor is adjusting the dials and opening more activities and sectors of the economy. Starting January 11:

- Indoor dining at bars and restaurants can open at 50 percent capacity, with a maximum of 150 people. Parties of no more than six people must remain six feet from other parties; bar seating is open to parties of two; reservations are required; and establishments must close dine-in service by 10 p.m.
- Gym capacity remains capped at 25 percent but maximum capacity increases to 150 and classes can increase to 25 people, assuming distancing can be observed. Machines and people must maintain 9 feet of distance. Face coverings are required.
- Outdoor events and entertainment continue at 25 percent capacity, but maximum capacity increases to 250 people. Social distancing is required.
- Indoor events and entertainment – like bowling alleys, movie theaters, and museums – may open at 25 percent, with no more than 150 people in each area of the venue. Face coverings are required, and they may not offer food service after 10 p.m.
- Youth and adult organized sports have resumed practice as of January 4 and games resume January 14 with spectators, following the appropriate capacity limits for indoor or outdoor venues. Inter-region tournaments and out of state play are discouraged.
- Pools opened on January 4 for some activity and may now open, like gyms, at 25 percent capacity.
- Wedding receptions and other private parties may resume with limits. If food and drink are served at the event, then they are limited to two households or 10 people indoors and 3 households or 15 people outdoors. If there is no food or drink, they are covered by event venue guidelines. Any related ceremony – like a wedding or funeral ceremony – is guided by rules for ceremonies and places of worship.
- Places of worship remain open at 50% capacity but without an overall maximum capacity.

“We have a lot to be thankful for as the COVID-19 situation improves and many of our students head back to school,” said Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. **“Because Minnesotans have made sacrifices to protect their neighbors, we are able to return to some of the activities we love. But COVID is still a threat, and we must remain cautious.”**

“Today, we can be cautiously optimistic about the progress Minnesotans have made in slowing the spread of COVID-19,” said Department of Employment and Economic Development Commissioner Steve Grove. **“I am thankful for the work and sacrifices the hospitality industry has made to keep their employees, neighbors and communities safe. These efforts pave the way for loosened guidelines, allowing more jobs and more business growth. To keep our economy moving, it’s critical that we all remain vigilant in fighting COVID-19 by masking up and staying safe.”**

As some restrictions loosen, Minnesota faces challenges to protecting the recent progress made.

- Some other states are seeing the virus surge.
- Public health experts, including Dr. Fauci, are warning of the potential for a post-holiday wave of cases.
- Concern remains about the emergence of a new, more contagious coronavirus variant spreading around the world.
- As the weather gets colder and Minnesotans move indoors, gatherings occur more often in settings that allow the virus to spread more easily.

“ **Minnesotans have worked hard and done their part to get us back from the edge of the cliff, and now they can help keep things on the right track** ,” Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm said. “ **One year into this pandemic, we know that improvements are tenuous. If we let our guard down, COVID-19 finds a way to surge back in terrifying ways. That means it’s still very important to wear a mask and stay 6 feet from others when you are out in the community. As we look for vaccines to become more widely available for all of us, these basic protections can serve as a bridge to better days ahead** .”

Minnesotans should continue to take precautions to combat the spread of the virus in their community – wear a mask, practice social distancing, and stay outside when possible. Minnesotans should also get tested if appropriate and download the COVIDawareMN smartphone app to get notified if they’ve been exposed to someone who tests positive.

Last month Governor Walz announced that every elementary school may return to in-person learning, recognizing that kids being in school is an important public health priority. The state has learned more about how to reduce the potential for spread in schools from success in other settings, and with additional mitigation strategies, giving the youngest learners the chance to be in person helps our kids get the high-quality education they need and helps bring relief to many families. Elementary schools may begin in-person learning on January 18.

Also last month, Governor Walz also signed into law $216 million in direct support for small businesses and workers affected by the pandemic, which has provided targeted aid to keep small businesses afloat, extended unemployment benefits for workers struggling to get by, and helped families put food on the table.

Executive Order 21-01 will have the full force and effect of law upon the approval of the Executive Council, which is made up of Governor Walz, Lt. Governor Flanagan, Attorney General Keith Ellison, Secretary of State Steve Simon, and State Auditor Julie Blaha.

More information on these restrictions and the state response is available here (https://staysafe.mn.gov/).

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