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.

Newsroom

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Governor Walz Announces Next Steps on COVID-19 to Prioritize Getting Kids Back in School, Protect Hospital Capacity

Governor also signs into law $216 million in direct support for small businesses and 13-week extension of unemployment benefits

December 16, 2020

[ST. PAUL, MN] – As hospitals remain concerned about capacity, Governor Tim Walz today announced a plan to continue combatting community spread of COVID-19 while getting students back in the classroom and supporting Minnesotans' quality of life. Following the announcement, the Governor signed into law a $216 million economic relief package to support small businesses and workers impacted by the pandemic.

"The sun is rising across Minnesota. Vaccines have arrived and the light at the end of the tunnel is much brighter today than it was at the beginning of this four-week dial back," Governor Walz said. **"There is strong evidence we are starting to turn a corner thanks to the hard work of Minnesotans over the last few weeks to keep each other safe. But we aren't out of the woods yet. This way forward will help bridge the gap to vaccination by continuing to protect hospital capacity while prioritizing getting our kids back in the classroom and supporting Minnesotans' quality of life."**

Kids being in school is an important public health priority. Schools play a critical role in the health, well-being, and education of Minnesota's children. Based on Minnesota's evolving understanding of the virus, young kids are believed to be less susceptible to serious complications from COVID-19. The state has also learned more about how to reduce the potential for spread in schools from success in other settings. Today the Governor updated the Safe Learning Plan so that starting on January 18, 2021, every elementary school across the state may choose to operate in an in-person learning model as long as they are able to implement additional mitigation strategies, which include providing and requiring staff to wear a face shield and mask and offering regular testing.

"This plan prioritizes the health, well-being, and education of our students, while taking precautions to protect the teachers and staff who care for them, so we can begin to help them make up for lost time," said Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. **"The best place for our students to learn is in the classroom. For our youngest learners, in-person learning is critical for their health and development in both the short and long term."**

Quality time with loved ones and regular exercise are critical to the mental and emotional well-being of families across the state. Several modifications to existing restrictions will allow Minnesotans to tend to their quality of life:

- **Social Gatherings:** Indoor gatherings are not recommended, but Minnesotans may gather inside with one other household up to 10 people. If outside, social gatherings may include up to two additional households (three total) with a maximum of 15 people, starting December 19. Masking and social distancing is strongly encouraged.
- **Gyms and fitness studios** : May open for individual exercise at 25 percent capacity, or 100 people maximum, with masks and 12 feet of physical distancing between individuals. Additional guidance about group classes, which can begin January 4, will be forthcoming.
- **Youth and adult sports:** Practices can resume January 4. Additional guidance regarding the resumption of practices will be forthcoming. Additionally, organized sports activity is no longer directly tied to county case data or school learning model.
- **Outdoor entertainment venues** : Open at 25 percent capacity, up to 100 people at a time. If food and drink are served, all must be seated.

As Minnesota approaches 4,500 deaths, our hospitalization rates and community spread put Minnesota well above the high-risk threshold and are still significantly higher than this summer and fall. Hospitals remain concerned about capacity as COVID-19 continues to spread in our communities across Minnesota. Governor Walz is continuing efforts to stem community spread of COVID-19 and support our frontline heroes. Inside entertainment venues, event spaces, and similar establishments remain closed until January 11.

Bars, restaurants, and breweries also remain closed for indoor dining, but they may open for outdoor service at 50 percent capacity or up to 100 people. Each table is limited to four people, and tables must be at least six feet apart. In his announcement, the Governor acknowledged this action is by no means a solution for the industry as a whole. Rather, it is a recognition that some establishments – particularly breweries – have put significant work into making outdoor service possible and this may prove helpful to some.

“**I’m very hopeful and thankful today**,” said Ken Holmen, MD, President and CEO of CentraCare. “ **I appreciate the leadership of the Governor and his staff during this challenging time and the collaboration among health care organizations as our amazing frontline workers provide 24/7 care under the most difficult of circumstances. I’m also thankful to our communities who are making sacrifices to protect the health and safety of our families, friends and neighbors.”**

“**We are making progress, but we can’t let up,”** Dr. Holmen continued. **“Hospitalizations from COVID-19 are starting to decrease. Vaccines are now here, but their impact will take several months. So we’re counting on every Minnesotan to keep doing your part – wear a mask, keep your distance and wash your hands. If we all do this over the next few weeks, it will save lives and be the best measure of our holiday spirit** .”

“We are thankful that so many Minnesotans have taken the right steps to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in their communities,” Minnesota Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm said. **“We have safe and effective vaccines starting to come into the state, but it will be many months before everyone has a chance to get vaccinated. In the meantime, we need to keep things moving in the right direction by doing those things we know help reduce COVID-19 transmission. That means masking up, keeping socially distant, washing your hands, staying home when sick and getting tested when appropriate.”**

Also today, Governor Walz signed into law $216 million in direct support for small businesses and workers affected by the pandemic. The bipartisan bill will provide direct, targeted aid to keep our small businesses afloat, extend unemployment benefits for workers struggling to get by, and help families put food on the table. The Governor said is an important step in the right direction as the state continues to push for federal relief.

“Today, because of the commitment of Minnesotans and our businesses to keep our families and our neighbors safe, we can carefully begin to turn a corner,” said DEED Commissioner Steve Grove. **“As the Governor signed the business relief package into law today, it will get much-needed to funding to businesses and additional Unemployment Insurance benefits to workers affected by this pandemic.”**

Executive Order 20-103 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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