

# Nevada orders indoor mask mandate in high-transmission areas

By Mary Hynes Las Vegas Review-Journal

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Nevada Gov. Steve Sisolak imposed a new mandate Tuesday that requires everyone, vaccinated or not, to wear masks indoors in public places in counties with high rates of COVID-19 transmission, including Clark County.

The governor's directive aligns with a new recommendation earlier in the day from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The directive includes a three-day grace period that gives businesses and residents until 12:01 a.m. Friday to comply.

"Businesses and residents in counties with substantial or high transmission are strongly urged to adopt the changes as soon as possible," said a news release from the governor's office.

Citing CDC data, the governor's office said 12 of Nevada's 17 counties are currently considered to have substantial or high transmission: Carson, Churchill, Clark, Douglas, Elko, Esmeralda, Lincoln, Lyon, Mineral, Nye, Washoe and White Pine.

The state's mandate does not apply to participants in certain activities or events, including athletes, performers and musicians.

The CDC's new guidance also recommended universal masking for kindergarten through 12th grade students, teachers and staff, regardless of

vaccination status. However, the state directive stops short of immediately making this a requirement for Nevada schools. Instead, during the grace period, conversations will continue with school district leaders centering on “the need to keep our children and educators safe. ...” the governor’s office said.

Meanwhile, the Clark County School District [announced earlier Tuesday](#) that it would be imposing a mask mandate to align with CDC recommendations.

The mandate comes at a time when cases and [hospitalizations have been rapidly climbing](#), especially in Clark County. The delta variant, a more infectious strain of the coronavirus, accounts for the majority of the new cases in state, which has one of the highest rates of COVID-19 in the country, according to CDC data. New evidence suggests that the delta variant is more likely to infect vaccinated individuals than other strains.

## **Mandate dropped in May**

The mandate is the latest step toward bringing masks back in Nevada, after Sisolak in mid-May [dropped the indoor mask mandate](#) for those who were vaccinated, following guidance from the CDC. At the time, the mandate remained for unvaccinated people in most public indoor settings, but was largely unenforced and often ignored.

But then, after the state dropped pandemic restrictions on June 1 and the delta variant took hold, cases of COVID-19 again began to increase.

On July 16, the Southern Nevada Health District recommended that everyone wear face masks in crowded indoor spaces such as grocery stores, malls and

casinos. Three days later, the Clark County Commission required masks in public indoor spaces for workers on the job, but not for members of the public.

Clark County Commissioner Marilyn Kirkpatrick, who is also chair of the health district's governing board, said in a statement, "The pandemic continues to be an evolving situation that requires Clark County to work closely with state, federal and local health officials in order to protect the health and safety of our community. "I am sure that we can put COVID-19 behind us if we all do our part to limit the spread of the virus," she continued. "Get vaccinated if you haven't done so already, get tested and stay home if you have any symptoms, and be part of our community's solution to ending the pandemic."

The Southern Nevada Health District noted Tuesday that the new CDC guidance upon which the state mandate is based aligns with the health district's prior recommendations. These recommendations were made "in response to increasing case counts and the COVID-19 positivity rate in Clark County," the district said in a statement.

"While using masks correctly has proven to be effective in helping to prevent people from getting and spreading COVID-19, the best, most effective step people can take to protect themselves is to get fully vaccinated," the district said.

The CDC's new recommendation applied to areas where there were at least 50 new cases per 100,000 people in the last week, which includes about 60 percent of U.S. counties, according to The Associated Press. There have been 236 new cases per 100,000 population in Clark County in that time frame, according to the health district's website.

# Casino industry on board

Southern Nevada casino industry indicated it would be ready when the mandate takes effect Friday.

The Nevada Gaming Control Board issued its own directive to the state's gaming licensees late Tuesday, ordering them to adhere to the CDC guidelines and Sisolak's order.

Gaming Control Board Chairman Brin Gibson's order told licensees they must post signage throughout their facilities notifying patrons where face coverings are required.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority issued a statement of support.

"We fully support the State of Nevada adopting the CDC's recommendation to help minimize the spread of the virus to enable our local community and visitors to enjoy all of the offerings that make Las Vegas the entertainment capital of the world," said Lori Nelson-Kraft, a spokeswoman for the LVCVA. "We continue to advocate and encourage vaccinations as they remain the most effective solution to combating the virus."

Those comments were echoed by Nevada Resort Association President Virginia Valentine, who said that it is "critical that we stop further spread of the variant, and masks are an effective tool in doing that."

"Vaccination remains the best defense against the virus, and we encourage all eligible individuals to get one as soon as possible to protect themselves and their loved ones," Valentine said in a statement. "Nevada's resort industry has been

tireless in its efforts to vaccinate its employees, their families and the public, and we will continue to work closely with health officials to contain the virus.”

Both [MGM Resorts](#) and Wynn Las Vegas said they would follow the governor’s directive. Other gaming companies did not comment on the mandate.

“We will follow the Governor’s and Control Board’s directive and require all guests and employees to wear masks indoors, which we will communicate with signage and masks at entrance doors to the resort,” Wynn Las Vegas said in a statement.

“Nothing is more important than the health and safety of guests, employees and our community. We continually evaluate and update our policies based on the latest information and guidance from health experts and public officials,” MGM said in a written statement.

Representatives from Las Vegas Sands Corp., Boyd Gaming Corp., Red Rock Resorts and Caesars Entertainment Corp. did not respond to requests for comment.

## **A plea for patience**

Bryan Wachter, Retail Association of Nevada’s senior vice president, asked visitors and residents to be patient.

“What we’re looking for is the public to have a lot of patience and consideration for service employees who are once again going to be on the front line of enforcing this mandate,” Wachter said.

But for Julian Hernandez, an employee at Sbarro Pizza taking his lunch break outside Planet Hollywood Resort on the Strip, the biggest worry continues to be the possibility of another shutdown.

“Just as long as things keep moving, I don’t mind masks,” Hernandez said.

Brendan Bussmann, director of governmental affairs for Las Vegas-based Global Market Advisors, said it wasn’t surprising that the mandate was imposed so soon after the CDC changed its guidance, as the state’s emergency directive is tied to that federal guidance.

“As quickly as we saw the mask mandate be lifted in May, it quickly came back today,” Bussmann said. “Let’s hope this is for the short term but the best option is to continue to implement the strong health and safety measures the industry launched some 16 months ago when it was first looking to reopen.”

Bussmann said that the gaming and hospitality industry continues to lead the way on health and safety measures for both employees and guests, but said that it’s concerning that the state had to bring the mask mandate back.

The new mandate, Bussmann added, is likely to cause some impact to the hospitality industry in the short term.

“The market was not kind to the industry earlier today when Wall Street saw the new mandate coming. Time will tell how visitors will react but it would not surprise me if some pull back.”

Two visitors from Chicago, Russell Bond and Brian Campbell, who were smoking cigarettes outside Planet Hollywood, said they supported the announcement “100 percent.”

They expressed hope that Chicago would soon adopt a similar mandate. Despite being vaccinated, neither man has stopped wearing masks while out in public to improve the odds of not getting sick.

“Everyone in Las Vegas should know what the odds are,” Bond said. “And why would you bet against yourself?”

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