



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on April 22, 2022

Philadelphia Drops Indoor Mask Mandate Five Days After Reinstating It

Five days after reinstating a city-wide indoor mask mandate, Philadelphia abruptly decided to drop it again. This past Saturday, a group of businesses filed a lawsuit challenging the city's renewed order.

According to [the update](#) posted on the city's official website today,

The City of Philadelphia announced today that residents and visitors are strongly encouraged, but not required, to wear a mask in indoor public spaces. This change follows a recent leveling-off of case counts and a decrease in COVID-19 hospitalizations in the city.



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The city further explained that residents and visitors “are permitted and encouraged” to wear masks in any setting.

All private businesses and other institutions “are allowed” to implement Covid policies that are stricter than those ordered by the city, the announcement noted. For example, businesses may choose to ask to see patrons' vaccination cards or require them to wear masks.

Schools, likewise, may set their own mask rules, yet the city “strongly encouraged” that students and teachers continue wearing masks “to keep each other safe.”

Folks will still need to mask up in healthcare settings and settings such as nursing homes and shelters.

[The announcement](#) from the city health department noted that Covid cases — after rising sharply between the end of March when cases were staying at 50-60 per day and mid-April, rising to a peak of 377 cases on April 14 — have finally leveled off and were averaging 242 per day as of April 21.

At the same time, Covid-related hospitalizations fell to 65 on April 21 after peaking at 82 on April 17.

“We have said throughout the pandemic that we will respond based on the data available. In implementing our mask mandate, we had promised to continue to monitor hospitalizations and to review the need for the mandate if hospitalizations did not rise following the rise in cases,” said Philadelphia's Health Commissioner, Dr. Cheryl Bettigole.

The decision, however, was not apparently based on data, but was the result of a vote held by the Board of Health on Thursday, as reflected in the announcement.

The commissioner also praised the Philadelphians and visitors who complied with the mandate, saying that it was thanks to them that the mandate was replaced with a “strong recommendation,” which Bettigole said was “more adequate” “at this stage of the pandemic.”



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On April 11, Philadelphia became the first major city to reinstate its indoor mask mandate, which went into effect this Monday.

The city allowed businesses and public institutions to ignore the rule if they require everyone on-site to be fully vaccinated and check vaccine status upon entry. According to city data, more than 1.25 million residents are fully vaccinated.

[As reported](#) by *The New American*, the city justified the reinstating of the mandate by saying that Covid cases were rising at a speed that the health department felt was not “safe.” In the city of 1.6 million people, neither hospitalizations nor death rates related to Covid had been on the rise.

“If we fail to act now, knowing that every previous wave of infections has been followed by a wave of hospitalizations, and then a wave of deaths, it will be too late for many of our residents,” Bettigole [warned](#) on April 12.

The move was met with fierce criticism from both residents and businesses. The Pennsylvania Restaurant & Lodging Association said in a [statement](#) that the mandate was “a major blow to thousands of small businesses hoping this spring would be the start of recovery,” adding that the city failed to even consult with businesses on the approaches and timing.

Several businesses and residents decided to take the city to court over the renewed mask mandate.

According to *The Hill* [report](#), the plaintiffs argued that the city officials exceeded their authority in enforcing the indoor mask mandate. They also argued the order violated the state constitution and was at odds with the recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). By the metrics used by the nation’s top healthcare agency, Philadelphia County’s Covid community level is [classified](#) as “low.”

Commenting on the latest developments, the plaintiffs’ lawyer, Thomas W. King III, [said](#), “We were very pleased to see Philadelphia make the correct decision to rescind the mask mandate.”

The mask mandate was apparently unpopular even among the Democratic contenders for the state’s open U.S. Senate seat.

As reported by the *Baltimore Sun*, “Shortly before news broke that the mandate was ending, the issue came up during Thursday night’s debate between the three leading Democratic candidates seeking the party’s nomination.... Notably, two of them, Lt. Gov. John Fetterman and state Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta of Philadelphia, came out against the mandate.”

Fetterman, among others, argued, “We have to move past Covid,” adding that he did not believe that “going backwards with a mask mandate or with closures is appropriate.”

All statewide mask mandates [have been lifted](#) as of late March. Several states limit mask mandates to certain “high-risk settings,” such as healthcare and long-term care facilities. Mask mandates in most states were either never imposed or were lifted in mid-February. The rest, mostly Democratic states, eased the restrictions in late February, following the [updated mask guidance](#) from the CDC.



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