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## HAWAII NEWS

# Hawaii to end mask mandate March 25

By [Nina Wu](#) • Today • Updated 8:00 am

Gov. David Ige [announced Tuesday](#) that Hawaii's indoor mask mandate will sunset along with the state's current emergency proclamation for the COVID-19 pandemic at 11:59 p.m. March 25.

Hawaii is the last U.S. state to announce an end to its mask mandate after coronavirus cases nationwide dropped steeply. Ige cited the continuation of declining COVID-19 case counts and hospitalizations, along with better treatments, as motivation for his decision.

"Because people of Hawaii have been serious about this and other measures to prevent the spread of the virus," said Ige, "we have reduced [COVID-19](#) in Hawaii to the point where most of us will be safe without masks indoors."

For more than two weeks, Hawaii had been the sole state without a confirmed end date for its statewide mask mandate despite [new federal guidelines saying indoor mask-wearing was no longer required in low- and medium-risk communities](#).

Based on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's new metrics, all of Hawaii is considered low-risk, and residents here do not need to wear masks. However, Ige warned that he would again impose the mask policy if COVID-19 cases rise dramatically.

"This is all promising, but we've seen previous progress wiped out by the delta or omicron variant, so I want to be very clear," said Ige. "I will be ready to institute mask policy if COVID cases should surge. We are continuing to monitor the global, national and local situation and will take the actions necessary to ensure the integrity of our state's health care system."

On Tuesday the state Department of Health reported 63 more infections statewide, bringing Hawaii's total since the start of the pandemic to 237,518 cases. No new deaths were reported, and the state's COVID-19 death toll remained at 1,354.

The seven-day average of new cases dipped to 148, a 52% drop from two weeks ago. The state's average positivity rate was at 2.3%.

These numbers mark a major turnaround from the unprecedented surge driven by the omicron variant, from mid-December to Jan. 19, when the weekly average cases count peaked at 4,667 before trending down, according to DOH data.

The state dashboard Tuesday listed 57 patients with COVID-19 at Hawaii hospitals, with four in intensive care and two on

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Lt. Gov. Josh Green, the state's health care liaison, has advocated for dropping the mask mandate and all pandemic-related restrictions on or before March 25.

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"With our case counts 96% off-peak and our hospitalizations 87% off-peak, we are in a safe space to move toward normal, and that includes dropping the mask mandate," he said.

Hawaii's public schools, however, will continue to require masks indoors, based on DOH recommendations, according to the state Department of Education, [while outdoor use will become optional, starting today.](#)

DOH Director Dr. Elizabeth Char said the department has been tracking trends in the state and across the nation for several weeks.

"Masks are still an important tool in preventing the transmission of COVID and other respiratory viruses," she said.

DOH advises that immunocompromised individuals, including kupuna, and anyone at high risk for serious illness continue to wear masks indoors. Additionally, Char said, DOH recommends mask-wearing for healthy individuals when around those at high risk.

Also, masks are still recommended in some indoor settings, such as at hospitals, health care facilities, nursing homes, shelters, prisons, jails and other congregate living settings.

Masks should be considered by anyone who is indoors with people whose vaccination status is unknown, according to Char. She added that people should stay up to date on vaccinations and booster shots, and get tested if sick or in close contact with someone infected as well as before and after travel.

Given the state's COVID-19 metrics, Dr. Scott Miscovich of Premier Medical Group agreed it makes sense to end Hawaii's indoor mask mandate. Even so, Miscovich said he is concerned about increased transmission of the coronavirus with the end of the mask mandate, primarily due to waning immunity among those who have not been boosted.

"We do know we have significant waning immunity that is occurring, and the waning immunity is more pronounced with age," he said.

As of Tuesday, 76.6% of the state's population had completed primary COVID-19 vaccines, while 37.7% were boosted.

Hawaii has had a mask mandate since April 2020, which at one point required masks both indoor and outdoors. The outdoor mask mandate [ended in late May 2021.](#)

News of the indoor mask mandate was welcomed by most of the business community.

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Tina Yamaki, president of Retail Merchants of Hawaii, said dropping the mask mandate is a “mixed bag” for retailers. Some employees might welcome it while others might not. Some customers might celebrate it, while others might hesitate to return because they no longer feel safe.

The greatest relief for retailers is no longer bearing the burden of enforcing mask-wearing in stores, which, despite the state’s reputation of aloha spirit, still resulted in verbal abuse — and in a few instances, [physical abuse](#) — from those who did not want to wear a mask.

Sherry Menor-McNamara, Chamber of Commerce Hawaii’s president and CEO, applauded the governor for ending the mandate after two long years of COVID-19 restrictions.

“The Chamber shares its appreciation for what businesses and the community have done to keep customers and employees safe during the pandemic,” said Menor-McNamara in a statement.

“Overall, we believe ending the state’s emergency proclamation will have a positive impact on our economy and the mental well being of our community and help get us back to pre-pandemic levels for job and revenue growth, and in a more positive frame of mind.”



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