

Capacity restrictions to end on May 28, masking requirement to end by July 1

Governor Tim Walz today announced a three-step timeline to end nearly all state COVID-19 restrictions by May 28, and end the statewide masking requirement once 70% of Minnesotans age 16 years and older get their vaccine, or by July 1. The announcement comes as more than 2.6 million Minnesotans have gotten their shot and the state is on track to vaccinate 70 percent of Minnesotans by the end of June.

“Our nation-leading vaccination effort has put us in a strong position to safely transition toward life as we used to know it,” said Governor Walz. **“The pandemic is not over and we have work to do. But from the State Fairgrounds, to doctor’s offices, to retrofitted Metro Transit buses that deliver vaccines where they’re most needed, Minnesotans now have more opportunities than ever to get the vaccine when and where they want to. As cases recede, more people get vaccinated every day, and vaccines are readily available to all who want it, we can now confidently and safely set out our path back to normal.”**

The most at-risk Minnesotans – seniors, long-term care residents, assisted living residents, educators, and front-line workers – have gotten their vaccines. Nearly 90 percent of Minnesotans over the age of 65 have gotten at least one dose.

“Thank you, Minnesota. For the past year you’ve made sacrifice after sacrifice. And now that we have three safe, effective vaccines that are widely available, we can begin to think about what life will look like after this pandemic,” said Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. **“We know that barriers still exist for many Minnesotans who want to receive the vaccine, especially those in underserved communities, and our work to connect them through community clinics and pharmacies, mobile vaccine clinics, and other targeted strategies continues. Our path forward now relies on Minnesotans getting the vaccine.”**

“I know the last year has tested us. But we made those sacrifices to save lives until a vaccine could keep Minnesotans safe,” Governor Walz continued. **“We all now have the ability to protect our loved ones. So go get your vaccines, Minnesota, and do your part to finally put this pandemic behind us.”**

Since mid-April, COVID-19 cases have declined. Hospitals are seeing fewer admissions and vaccination progress has relentlessly pushed forward. Vaccines held COVID-19 variants at bay and avoided having them overwhelm our state.

The three-step process will end nearly all state COVID-19 restrictions by May 28, and end the statewide masking requirement by July 1 at the latest.

Step one takes place at noon on May 7. It includes initial steps to relax some restrictions, primarily in outdoor settings.

- Removes limits for outdoor dining, events, and other get-togethers, and ends the mask requirement outdoors except at large venues with over 500 people.

- Eliminates the state-established mandatory closing time for bars, restaurants, and food and beverage service at other places of public accommodation.

The second step begins on May 28. Remaining capacity and distancing limits will come to an end, including for indoor events and gatherings. The requirements that will remain include:

- Face coverings indoors and for outdoor events that exceed 500 people.
- There will be no new safety requirements for businesses, though they must maintain their plans to keep their employees and customers safe – as they have from the beginning of the pandemic – guided only by a minimal universal state guidance document.

The third step takes place once 70 percent of Minnesotans age 16 years and older – 3,087,404 Minnesotans – get at least one dose of the vaccine, but no later than July 1.

- The remaining face covering requirement and the requirement for preparedness plans will end. Work on vaccines will continue, and local jurisdictions and entities may set their own mask policies.

Because the youngest Minnesotans are not yet eligible for the vaccine, the Safe Learning Plan for schools will continue until the end of the school year to protect students, teachers, and staff in schools.

Additional protections will remain, including the eviction moratorium, a ban on price gouging, and eligibility exemptions for people who receive state services. The State will continue its emergency efforts to get Minnesotans tested and vaccinated and will continue to monitor the virus and the growth of variants in the months to come.

Additionally, local jurisdictions and businesses may still require masks and have other requirements beyond July 1.

“Minnesotans made today’s announcement possible through their hard work and perseverance,” said Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm. **“This is a day for us to celebrate the progress, while also recognizing the work that remains to be done. So long as the virus remains a threat to people anywhere it is a threat to people everywhere. That means we need to be watchful and keep up the good work that got us to this point. If you are eligible for a vaccine and haven’t received one yet, now is a great time to get one. Your decision helps protect your family, your community, and all Minnesotans.”**

“Today, we can celebrate the final steps we are taking to reopen our economy,” said DEED Commissioner Steve Grove. **“Countless businesses and hundreds of thousands of Minnesota employees have made extraordinary sacrifices to keep our communities safe this past year, and today we’re taking steps to lift restrictions and begin the path towards**

normal operations. Let's keep our economy moving by getting out there and supporting the local businesses we love."