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Gov. Wolf, Sec. of Health Announce New Protective Mitigation Efforts to Put Pennsylvania on Pause through Early January

[Gov. Wolf Limited-Time Mitigation Order](#)

[Sec. Levine Limited-Time Mitigation Order](#)

Harrisburg, PA – As COVID-19 cases continue to rise, Governor Tom Wolf and Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine today implored Pennsylvanians to take the next three weeks and stand united against the virus by adhering to existing mitigation orders and stricter efforts announced today.

“Today I am announcing additional, temporary COVID-19 protective mitigation measures in the commonwealth,” said Gov. Wolf. “With these measures in place, we hope to accomplish three goals: First, stop the devastating spread of COVID-19 in the commonwealth. Second, keep our hospitals and health care workers from becoming overwhelmed. And third, help Pennsylvanians get through the holiday season – and closer to a widely available vaccine – as safely as possible. This is a bridge to a better future in Pennsylvania.”

The new, limited-time mitigation orders take effect at 12:01 a.m. on December 12, and remain in effect until 8 a.m. on January 4, 2021.

“Each of the last two days we have reported the highest number of deaths since the beginning of the pandemic,” Dr. Rachel Levine said. “In the past week, we have reported close to 1,100 new deaths from COVID-19 across Pennsylvania. The virus continues to strain our health care systems and the dramatic rise in cases among all age groups, including among school-age children, is alarming. Since the start of the pandemic, there have been more than 37,500 cases among children age 5 to 18, yet 9,500 of those cases occurred in the past two weeks.”

The Order provisions outlined here are accompanied by supportive data used in part to make these decisions. The data provides a sampling of research that supports why limiting gatherings, reducing occupancy, and temporarily suspending some activities, among other efforts, are considered vital to stopping the spread of COVID-19.

Two recent studies, one by Yale University and one by Stanford University, substantiate more than one of these mitigation efforts. Links to the full studies and additional data and research can be found on the Department of Health's data page, [here](#).

Limited-Time Mitigation efforts announced today include:

In-Person Dining and Alcohol Sales

- All in-person indoor dining at businesses in the retail food services industry, including, but not limited to, bars, restaurants, breweries, wineries, distilleries, social clubs, and private catered events is prohibited.
- Outdoor dining, take-out food service, and take-out alcohol sales are permitted and may continue, subject to any limitations or restrictions imposed by Pennsylvania law, or this or any other Order issued by the Sec. of Health or by the governor.

Multiple studies have found indoor dining to drive case increases and fatalities. A [study](#) by JP Morgan analyzed credit card spending of more than 30 million Chase cardholders and Johns Hopkins University's case tracker and found that higher restaurant spending in a state predicted a rise in new infections there three weeks later. Additionally, research from Stanford University found that restaurants accounted for a significant amount of new infections while research from Yale University found that closing restaurants reduced fatality rates.

Indoor Gatherings and Events

- Indoor gatherings and events of more than 10 persons are prohibited.
- Churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and other places of congregative worship are specifically excluded from the limitations set forth above during religious services, these institutions are strongly encouraged to find alternative methods for worship, as in person gatherings pose a significant risk to participants at this time. While this an incredibly difficult recommendation to make, particularly at this time of year, faith leaders must carefully weigh the health risks to their congregants given the immense amount of community spread of COVID-19.

A [new study](#) from Stanford University and published in the journal, *nature*, used cellphone data collected from 10 U.S. cities from March to May to demonstrate that restaurants, gyms, cafes, churches and other crowded indoor venues accounted for some 8 in 10 new infections in the early months of the U.S. coronavirus epidemic.

Outdoor Gatherings and Events

- Outdoor gatherings and events of more than 50 persons are prohibited.

According to a [Yale University study](#), limiting outdoor gatherings was among consistent policies found to reduce fatality rates.

The [CDC](#) states that medium-sized outdoor gatherings carry a higher risk of COVID-19 spread, even with social distancing. CDC notes that the more people an individual interacts with at a gathering and the longer that interaction lasts, the higher the potential risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 and COVID-19 spreading, and that the higher the level of community

transmission in the area that the gathering is being held, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spreading during a gathering.

Capacity Limits for Businesses

- All in-person businesses serving the public may only operate at up to 50% of the maximum capacity stated on the applicable certificate of occupancy, except as limited by existing orders to a smaller capacity limit.

The same Stanford University [study](#) that collected cellphone data also noted that limiting indoor capacity can reduce COVID-19 transmissions.

Gyms and Fitness Facilities

- Indoor operations at gyms and fitness facilities are prohibited.
- Outdoor facilities and outdoor classes can continue, but all participants must wear face coverings in accordance with the Sec. of Health's [Updated Order Requiring Universal Face Coverings](#), including any subsequent amendments, and practice physical distancing requirements.

According to a [Yale University study](#), closing businesses like gyms was among consistent policies found to reduce fatality rates.

Entertainment Industry

- All in-person businesses in the entertainment industry serving the public within a building or indoor defined area, including, but not limited to, theaters, concert venues, museums, movie theaters, arcades, casinos, bowling alleys, private clubs, and all other similar entertainment, recreational or social facilities, are prohibited from operation.

The CDC puts movie theaters and other indoor settings on its list of higher-risk activities for contracting COVID-19.

In-Person Extracurricular School Activities

- Voluntary activities sponsored or approved by a school entity's governing body or administration are suspended, but these extracurricular activities may be held virtually. This includes, but is not limited to, attendance at or participation in activities such as musical ensembles, school plays, student council, clubs, and school dances.

Our top priority is stopping the spread of this virus so students and teachers can return to their classrooms as soon as possible. [Data](#) from the Department of Health notes that one-quarter of the cases of COVID among school-age children have occurred within the past two weeks, increasing the need to keep children safe outside of school so that they can return to classrooms.

K-12 School Sports and Youth Sports

- All sports at K-12 public schools, nonpublic schools, private schools and club, travel, recreational, intermural, and intramural sports are paused.

The Pennsylvania Principals Association is recommending a delay to the start of the winter sports season. The [surge in cases](#) among school-age children increases the risk that asymptomatic participants will spread the virus at a game or practice, in the locker room, while traveling to and from events, or at team meals, parties or other gatherings.

Professional and Collegiate Sports

- Professional or collegiate sports activities may continue in accordance with guidance from the CDC and the Department of Health.
- Spectators may not attend such sports activities in person.

The [CDC warns](#) large gatherings create a high risk of COVID-19 spreading.

“We know that COVID-19 thrives in places where people gather together,” Gov. Wolf said. “Therefore, these mitigation measures target high-risk environments and activities and aim to reduce the spread of this devastating virus.”

According to Yale University [research](#), mitigation measures such as mandatory mask requirements, and gym and restaurant closures are policies that most consistently predict lower four- to six-week-ahead fatality growth.

“The work we do now to slow the spread of COVID-19 is not only crucial to keeping our fellow Pennsylvanians safe and healthy,” Gov. Wolf said. “It will help all of us get back to normal, and back to all of the things we’ve missed, faster. And it means more Pennsylvanians will be alive to celebrate that brighter future. This year, we show our love for our families and friends by celebrating safely and protecting one another.”

[Gov. Wolf Limited-Time Mitigation Order](#)

[Sec. Levine Limited-Time Mitigation Order](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Gov. Wolf Amended Mitigation, Enforcement, and Immunity Order](#)

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