

Ige: State to continue mask mandate for now

By [JOHN BURNETT Hawaii Tribune-Herald](#) | Thursday, May 13, 2021, 4:05 p.m.



Gov. David Ige said this afternoon that — despite a U.S. Centers for Disease Control advisory stating fully vaccinated Americans can go without a mask in most places — he will keep the state’s mask mandate in place for now.

“Everyone must wear their masks indoors,” Ige said during a press conference. “And if they are outdoors and can maintain physical distance,

then they don't have to wear their masks.

"I would just like to note that implementing these mandates are complicated. ... As of today, only about 40% of Hawaii's residents are fully vaccinated, which means the majority of us in the islands are not vaccinated."

That runs counter to both the new CDC guidelines announced Thursday and a Rose Garden press conference held by President Joe Biden at the White House, who touted the new guidelines as "a great day for America."

"If you are fully vaccinated, you no longer need to wear a mask," he said, summarizing the new guidance and encouraging more Americans to roll up their sleeves. "Get vaccinated — or wear a mask until you do."

The guidance still calls for wearing masks in crowded indoor settings like buses, planes, hospitals, prisons and homeless shelters, but it will help clear the way for reopening workplaces, schools and other venues — even removing the need for social distancing for those who are fully vaccinated.

"We have all longed for this moment — when we can get back to some sense of normalcy," Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC, said at an earlier White House briefing.

Ige said he and his administration "continue to evaluate the CDC guidance."

"We'll be making adjustments as ... appropriate," he said. "I think the challenge is that it's impossible to determine who's vaccinated and who's not vaccinated.

"... We will continue to enforce the mask mandate. I will just say ... as I've traveled out and about in the community, I see overwhelming compliance. Most people I see are wearing their masks as they go about their business shopping, picking up their food or other activities. I do believe that's one of

the reasons why, per capita, we've had very low infection rates."

Mayor Mitch Roth also issued his own statement today, saying any relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions must be done "without jeopardizing our community's health and safety."

"We must also do so together, as a state — four counties, with one clear vision," Roth said. "Therefore, our county will adhere to Gov. Ige and the state's directives while continuing to have regular conversations regarding proposed changes to our emergency rules. ... This means wearing a mask, socially distancing, and doing all of the little things we have gotten so accustomed to until notified otherwise. It also means getting vaccinated so that we can get back to the things we love most, like contact sports, concerts, and other social gatherings, faster."

Noting the Pfizer vaccine is now available to everyone ages 12 and older, Ige again urged the public to become vaccinated. He also acknowledged there could be confusion, and perhaps a backlash from some in the public, with the CDC issuing newer, relaxed guidelines and the state continuing its mandate requiring the wearing of face coverings.

"We put a tremendous amount of effort in putting the message out and ... we do recognize that for vaccinated individuals, it may be OK and healthy and safe to be out and about without a mask. But clearly, for the benefit of our entire community, it's better that we wear masks where we get to the point where 70 or 80% of our community is fully vaccinated.

"Especially, we want to get more of our children vaccinated at 12 and older — and Pfizer is working on a vaccine that can be given safely to children 5 and older, and it could be available to children as young as 2 and older."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Email John Burnett at jburnett@hawaiitribune-herald.com.