

Counties consider new policy to curb COVID-19 infections in Hawaii

By [Ashley Mizuo](#) Today Updated 12:15 am



County mayors met with Gov. David Ige on Friday to discuss the possibility of further restrictions as the number of COVID-19 cases continues to spiral out of control.

The meeting came as the state broke its single-day record with 1,035 new COVID-19 cases and nine coronavirus-related deaths.

County mayors are looking at various policies such as voluntary lockdowns or vaccine passports for restaurant patrons.

Honolulu Mayor Rick Blangiardi is considering implementing a mandatory coronavirus vaccine or testing requirement to visit restaurants.

He stopped short of announcing the program due to his meeting with Ige and other county mayors that could alter the plan.

"We were going to go ahead with a vaccine passport, and we're prepared to execute bold ideas," Blangiardi said Friday on the Honolulu Star-Advertiser's Spotlight Hawaii livestream program. "I just don't want that to get lost on this pending discussion with the governor and the other mayors right now, to be sure that when we do make an announcement that we're not going to say this and the next day or two it's something else. It's very fluid."

The proposal would have required patrons and employees to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test within the past 72 hours. After talking to the Hawaii Restaurant Association, the city was going to instead require 60 days of weekly testing for unvaccinated employees and monitor the data for levels of infection that would then trigger mandating the vaccine for workers.

However, the plan is now on hold as Blangiardi is meeting with the governor and other county mayors to discuss plans for possible further restrictions.

Maui Mayor Michael Victorino asked residents to participate in a voluntary 21-day lockdown.

"We're appealing to visitors and residents to make these responsible choices and avoid risky behavior," said Maui County Managing Director Sandy Baz.

"Please consider voluntarily restricting activities, essential needs only like grocery shopping, doctor visits. Avoid gatherings, especially indoor gatherings with family and friends that are outside of your household."

Baz urged visitors to remain at their resort accommodations and not venture to areas like Hana where there have been clusters of COVID-19 infection.

Victorino warned that if case counts did not decrease in the coming weeks, more restrictions would need to be put in place such as limiting bar operation hours and reducing or canceling elective medical procedures to increase hospital capacity.

Victorino currently has a request submitted to the governor to amend Maui County's public health care emergency rules, but did not elaborate on the exact changes that were requested.

Meanwhile, Kaiser Permanente announced that it would be postponing nonurgent surgeries and procedures at Moanalua Medical Center and on Maui, starting Monday, for at least the next few weeks.

Kaiser estimated that a low number of procedures would be affected, although the situation could become more acute in the coming weeks.

"As we continue to work through the most severe surge of the pandemic thus far, we're taking steps to meet the health care needs of our patients and the community," said Dr. Zamir Moen, chief of medical staff at Kaiser Permanente Moanalua Medical Center, in a news release.

Patients who will be affected will be contacted by Kaiser.

Victorino urged people to continue to wear masks and get vaccinated.

"I've heard all the reasons why: 'I don't have to do this. It's my constitutional rights. It is my freedom.' But freedom comes with responsibility," he said.

"If you don't have responsibility, you quickly lose freedom."

Blangiardi was against instituting a full lockdown on Oahu but acknowledged that it was likely up to the governor and the state Department of Health.

"That's what we're on the verge of right now is whether or not something draconian would have to take place like a lockdown, which I am not in favor of doing," he said.

"The economy in Hawaii, on Oahu at least, is significant, and it's very complicated."

New COVID-19 cases in Hawaii have surged since the end of July. Hawaii is now 17th in the nation for average seven-day daily new infections, now 49.2 cases per 100,000 population, according to the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism. In comparison, the national seven-day average of daily new cases is 43.1 cases per 100,000 population.

Blangiardi urged people to get vaccinated as Honolulu's total population vaccination rate is at 64%. According to state health data as of Thursday, 62.6% of the state's population has been fully vaccinated.

"This is not a circumstance about individual rights. This is about community health," he said. "I don't know what else I can possibly say to those people that I've seen firsthand, they're so hostile and angry about this. I just hope you don't get sick, and I hope you don't die."

The new confirmed and probable infection count by island announced Friday included 672 new cases on Oahu, 120 on Maui, 184 on Hawaii island, 38 on Kauai, three on Molokai and 18 Hawaii residents diagnosed outside the state.

All nine of the latest deaths involved patients with underlying conditions. All but one was hospitalized. There was one woman and two men in their 50s, a man and a woman in their 60s, and one woman and two men in their 70s.

Another man in his 70s died at home.

Staff writer Nina Wu contributed to this report.