

# What you need to know about MSDH's new COVID guidelines for colleges

by Molly Minta  
With the fall semester weeks away, the Mississippi Department of Health has released updated guidelines for mitigating the spread of the coronavirus in colleges and universities. This comes as the delta variant “sweeps over Mississippi like a tsunami,” State Health Officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs said in a press conference on Thursday.

“We’ve seen a phenomenal increase in the number of daily reported cases of COVID,” Dobbs said, “and this is entirely attributable to the delta variant.”

As the “primary health prevention strategy” to stem transmission of the virus, the new guidelines recommend all eligible students, faculty and staff receive the COVID-19 vaccine. It also urges colleges and universities to direct everyone on campus, regardless of vaccination status, to mask-up in all indoor facilities and in crowded outdoor settings.

Students are recommended to continue social distancing in classrooms, and all students, faculty and staff should stay home if they are sick with any in-



A student leaves Gibbs-Green Plaza at Jackson State University, in Jackson, Miss., Thursday, April 20, 2017. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

fectious illness.

“You can’t fill a classroom with non-immune kids without a mask on with the most contagious coronavirus you’ve ever seen circulating and expect for it not to spread,” Dobbs said. “It’s just biology.”

Colleges and universities are further advised to continue contact tracing to identify COVID-19 positive individuals and remove them from the school setting, particularly dormitories where transmission is more likely.

Lastly, the guidance also contains strategies that schools can use to manage and respond to an outbreak. “I just want to remind

everybody that we have COVID top to bottom in every single county,” said Dr. Paul Byers, the state epidemiologist. “We are seeing increases and high transmission in every single county across the state — we are going to see cases in all settings and all counties.”

Shortly after MSDH released its new guidance in a memo Wednesday afternoon, Mississippi State University and University of Mississippi announced that they would temporarily require masks in all indoor activities and locations on campus.

“We’re optimistic that this temporary mask uti-

lization indoors will help ensure a successful start to the school year,” UM Chancellor Glenn Boyce wrote in an email to students, faculty and staff. “We will evaluate this protocol daily based on how spread of the virus evolves on campus and in our community.”

“Let me emphasize that we are implementing this temporary mitigation strategy as the least disruptive way to ensure a full campus experience,” Boyce added in bold.

At the end of the spring semester, Boyce announced that UM would be returning to “a full resumption of in-person classes” and pre-COVID-19 operations starting this fall.

MSU similarly opened up its campus over the summer, announcing June 30 that all facilities, including meeting rooms and auditoriums, could operate at 100% capacity.

The new guidance from MSDH and the surge in COVID cases led MSU to reconsider that plan, according to a press release announcing the temporary mask mandate.

“After the first few weeks of the Fall 2021 semester, it is our hope that MSU may

be able to move to mask-optional policies if the number of cases on campus and in the community decreases, and vaccination rates improve substantially,” MSU wrote.

Mississippi is currently experiencing a fourth wave of COVID-19 due to the highly infectious delta variant. On Thursday, MSDH reported 3,164 new cases, close to double the number of daily cases reported a week ago.

“I really do think it’s going to be the worst wave to date,” Dobbs said.

The deluge of cases comes almost entirely from unvaccinated people, Byers said on Thursday, who tend to be in younger age groups. As of mid-July, college-aged people made up more than 60% of all new cases over the last two months in Mississippi, according to MSDH.

Byers said that while this age cohort “may not have serious complications from COVID-19,” it’s still important for them to get vaccinated because they “are serving as a source of transmission to (the) most vulnerable population,” those who are immunocompromised or older than 65.

“It’s incumbent upon all of us to make sure that not only are we vaccinated to protect ourselves, but to protect those individuals

around us from infection,” Byers added.

MSDH’s guidance stops short of requiring students or faculty get vaccinated — something hundreds of professors across the state have pushed for in online petitions.

Dobbs said he doesn’t think there is consensus in Mississippi yet over whether the COVID-19 vaccine should be mandated for college and university students.

“Having everyone vaccinated and even looking at mechanisms to make that happen make sense from a transmission perspective,” Dobbs said. “I appreciate their opinion and I wish they keep sharing it. And if that’s the general consensus, instead of being hundreds (of signatures), it would’ve been thousands.”

Dobbs is also uncertain that MSDH will recommend a mandate even if the COVID-19 receives final approval from the Food and Drug Administration.

“Mandates are a curious sort of animal,” he said. “We’ll work with colleges to make those sorts of decisions. This is not really a ‘top-down, Department-of-Health, we-tell-you-what-to-do’ sort of situation. These sorts of things require coalition building and consensus to some degree, and we are not really there yet.”

# U.S. CDC announces new 60-day COVID-19 eviction moratorium

By David Shepardson and Trevor Hunnicutt

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Tuesday issued a new 60-day moratorium on residential evictions in areas with high levels of COVID-19 infections citing the raging Delta variant after having rejected an earlier push by the White House.

The order applies to about 80% of U.S. counties that have substantial or high COVID-19 community transmission rates and covers about 90% of the U.S. population. The CDC said it will expand the protections to additional counties if they see a rise in COVID-19 cases.

“The emergence of the Delta variant has led to a rapid acceleration of community transmission in the United States, putting more Americans at increased risk, especially if they are unvaccinated,” CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said in a statement. “This moratorium is the right thing to do to keep people in their homes and out of congregate set-

tings where COVID-19 spreads.”

The CDC cited survey data that 6.9 million renters were behind on their rent in June and suggested mass evictions were likely without action.

The new CDC order will protect millions of renters from eviction but is slightly more limited than a nationwide moratorium that expired Saturday at midnight, and is almost certain to face legal challenges.

On Sunday, the CDC rejected President Joe Biden’s request for a new scaled-down pandemic-related moratorium, citing a lack of legal authority stemming from a recent Supreme Court decision.

Biden had urged an extension so more than \$40 billion in unused money approved by Congress to help pay unpaid rent can be distributed to renters and landlords and keep people in their homes.

More than 15 million people in 6.5 million U.S. households are currently behind on rental payments, according to a study by the Aspen Insti-

tute and the COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project, collectively owing more than \$20 billion to landlords.

The National Apartment Association, with 82,600 members that collectively manage more than 9.7 million rental units last week sued the U.S. government seeking billions of dollars in unpaid rent due to the moratorium.

The group called the new eviction moratorium “an unfunded government mandate that forces housing providers to deliver a costly service without compensation and saddles renters with insurmountable debt.”

A Supreme Court opinion in June suggested that legislative approval would be required to extend the moratorium. It is unclear if the court will review the new more limited moratorium differently.

Biden on Tuesday acknowledged the legal risks of moving ahead with a new moratorium but said it will probably give some “additional time” to renters as the issue makes it way through the courts.

The CDC moratorium, which was put in place in September 2020 and kept millions of people from being forced out of their homes for unpaid rent during the pandemic, was extended for another 30 days in June and officials at the time said it would be the final extension.

But with COVID-19 rates climbing, some House Democrats led by Representative Cori Bush staged a protest outside the U.S. Capitol that put pressure on the administration to reverse course and protect renters at risk.

The new moratorium will last until Oct. 3.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, both Democrats, had urged a reinstatement of the ban after Congress was unable to do so.

“This brand new moratorium will provide time for the money allocated by Congress to flow, as it helps stop the spread of the virus which is worsening due to the Delta variant and protects families and landlords,” Pelosi said

in a statement.

Biden also called on state and local governments to extend or put in place eviction bans for at the least the next two

months, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

Some states like New York and California have already extended state eviction bans past July 31.

## Lexington Historic Preservation Commission announces guidelines for Free Little Library

Guidelines for the Free Little Library are as follows:

- Shall not be located within or overhang the public street right-of-way or any public easement.
- Shall not obstruct vehicular, bicycle or pedestrian traffic, either physically, or by a person utilizing the Free Little Library.
- Shall not obstruct access aisles or paths utilized by persons in wheelchairs or for ADA accessibility.
- May be placed as an approved free-standing fixture in a front yard (area between the front wall of a building and the public street right-of-way).
- Shall be anchored to the ground.
- No larger than 2 foot squared.
- Must have a pitched roof.
- Must always agree to

maintain the structure, all materials must be treated.

- Must be mounted on a 4x4 treated post.
- If located within the Historical District, please submit location to city hall for review by the Historical Preservation Commission.

Please remember if you live within the Historical District you must obtain a permit before any construction or demolition begins. If you have any questions, please call Melissa Upchurch Historical Preservation Commission Chairman at 662-670-4406.

New Commission members are: Melissa Upchurch, President, Nanci-Taylor Maddux, Secretary, Jeanette Neal, Treasurer, Leroy Riley, Dr. Gerald Stinson and Maudie Wilcoxson.