



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on May 19, 2021

Abbott Bans Mask Mandates, Says “Texans, Not Government, Should Decide Their Best Health Practices”

Texas Governor Greg Abbott (R) issued an [executive order](#) Tuesday prohibiting state governmental entities, such as county institutions and public school districts, as well as public health authorities and government officials from requiring mask-wearing.

In a [news release](#), Abbott stated that “The Lone Star State continues to defeat COVID-19 through the use of widely available vaccines, antibody therapeutic drugs, and safe practices utilized by Texans in our communities... Texans, not government, should decide their best health practices, which is why masks will not be mandated by public school districts or government entities. We can continue to mitigate COVID-19 while defending Texans’ liberty to choose whether or not they mask up.” Any local official who attempts to issue mask mandates after the order takes effect can be fined up to \$1,000, the governor said.



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The executive order allows public schools to continue current mask-wearing guidelines through June 4; however, after June 4, no student, teacher, parent, or staff member can be required to wear a mask on school grounds, according to the order.

State-supported living centers, jails, government-owned hospitals and government-operated hospitals are excluded from the order and may continue requiring masks.

Abbott ended the state’s mask mandate on March 2, and moved to “open Texas 100%,” citing declining COVID-19 hospitalizations across the state and rising numbers of vaccinations.

Still, some local officials said they would continue to require masks, [including in the city of Austin](#), drawing lawsuits by Attorney General Ken Paxton. Austin’s mandate was later [upheld](#) by a judge.

Bexar County and San Antonio officials [opposed](#) the Abbott’s March order, and found a workaround, shifting responsibility to implement mask mandates to businesses. Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff issued his own [executive order](#), requiring businesses to post their COVID-19 protocols in a visible location, and “require, at a minimum, that all employees or visitors ... wear face coverings when in an area or performing an activity which will necessarily involve close contact.”

Businesses that fail to follow the order may be fined by \$1,000, while customers who are asked to wear masks and refuse could be charged with criminal trespassing.



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In his Tuesday order, Abbott said those local governments “have caused confusion” by continuing to implement local rules despite the statewide rollback.

The liberal approach to mitigating the spread of COVID has been [blasted](#) by federal authorities and President Biden himself, who [called](#) lifting mask mandates and economy reopening “Neanderthal thinking” and “a big mistake.” However, new infections and deaths have fallen steadily in Texas since the state reopened. This past Sunday the second-most populated state [recorded](#) zero COVID deaths. It also [observed](#) the lowest number of new cases in 13 months and the lowest number of hospitalizations in 11 months.

Despite the palpable success in stabilizing the states’ public health and getting its economy back on track without sacrificing people’s liberties, local Democrats oppose Abbott’s order.

Democratic Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner [called](#) Abbott’s order on Tuesday “a clear overreach. His power is not absolute.”

“If you are a city of Houston employee or entering a city facility and you have not been fully vaccinated, you should wear your mask,” Turner continued in a statement. “We are not mandating it, but I strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated to protect themselves, their family, and their co-workers.” Just like the rest of the state, Houston has seen a dramatic [decline](#) in COVID-19 hospitalizations, positivity rate and new cases.

[Reportedly](#), some school districts’ representatives and teachers’ [unions](#) were not enthusiastic about the order, either, as it is arguably the most consequential for public schools. Barry Perez, Northside Independent School District executive director of communications, released a statement on behalf of the district calling Abbott’s order “both disappointing and concerning.”

Similarly, San Angelo Independent School District called the order “disappointing,” saying they will be enforcing mask mandates until the deadline, June 4, and then “encourage” people to wear them.

Travis County Judge Andy Brown also released a statement on Abbott’s order, [saying](#) Governor Abbott’s “party politics” endangers safety of children when taking away the schools’ authority to put a mask on children’s faces “for their own good.”

“Governor Abbott once again put party politics above public health. Today, Dr. Fauci said that kids 11 years old and younger won’t be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine until early 2022. By prohibiting school districts from taking common-sense steps to keep kids safe, the Governor has put our most vulnerable, young children, at risk.”

Texas Health and Human Services [data](#) shows children aged 1-9 account for 1.73 percent of Texas COVID cases, and children aged 0-19 account for 6.8 percent. Fatality rate is 0.02 percent and 0.1 percent, accordingly. Additionally, there is ample evidence that masks are not just [ineffective](#) at containing the spread of respiratory viruses but actually [compromise](#) the physical and mental health of children.



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