

Oregon extends mask, distancing rules for businesses indefinitely

By Sara Cline
Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND — Oregon adopted a controversial rule on Tuesday, May 4 that indefinitely extends coronavirus mask and social distancing requirements for all businesses in the state.

State officials say the rule, which garnered thousands of public comments, will be in place until it is “no longer necessary to address the effects of the pandemic in the workplace.”

“We reviewed all of the comments — including the many comments that opposed the rule — and we gave particular consideration to those comments that explained their reasoning or provided concrete information,” said Michael Wood, administrator of the state’s department of Occupational Safety and Health. “Although we chose to move forward with the rule, the final product includes a number of changes based on that record.”

Oregon, which has been among those with the country’s most stringent COVID-19 restrictions, had previously had a mask rule for businesses, but it was only temporary and could not be extended beyond 180 days. That prompted Wood to create a permanent rule with the intent to repeal it at some point.

“To allow the workplace COVID-19 protections to simply go away would have



Jake Crandall/Montgomery (Alabama) Advertiser-TNS

Face masks will be required for the time being in all businesses in Oregon.

left workers far less protected. And it would have left employers who want to know what is expected of them with a good deal less clarity than the rule provides,” Wood said.

But the proposal prompted a flood of angry responses, with everyone from parents to teachers to business owners and employees crying government overreach.

Wood’s agency received more than 5,000 comments — mostly critical — and nearly 70,000 residents signed a petition against the rule.

Opponents raised concerns that there is no sunset date or specific metric for when the rule would automatically be repealed. As a result, Wood said the final rule includes considerably more detail

about the process and criteria that will be used to make the decision to repeal the rule.

The rule requires that employers make sure that under most circumstances people wear masks while working inside and use face coverings outside if they have to be within six feet of people. It also mandates that businesses make sure people aren’t within six feet of each other — unless that’s not practical for certain activities.

The agency said it would be considered if the rule can be repealed, starting no later than July.

Besides mask and distancing requirements, the rule — which also includes requirements and guidelines regarding air flow, ventilation, employee notification in case of an outbreak, and sanitation protocols — dovetails with separate actions and restrictions by Gov. Kate Brown, the latest being in-

creased county risk levels.

Last week Oregon recorded the fastest-growing COVID-19 infection rate in the nation, and as a result Brown implemented further restrictions in 15 counties, including banning indoor dining at restaurants and bars and significantly decreasing capacity in gyms and indoor entertainment spaces.

The restrictions were criticized by business owners and Republican lawmakers.

On Tuesday, those counties were moved back a level, effective Friday, because the statewide seven-day average increase for hospitalized COVID-19 positive patients dropped below 15 percent. This means indoor dining and other activities will be allowed.

“With Oregonians continuing to get vaccinated each week, my expectation is that we will not return to Extreme Risk again for the duration of this pandemic,” Brown said.

So far, about one-third of Oregon’s population has been fully vaccinated.

Around 75% of the state’s staffed adult ICU beds and about 85% of the state’s staffed adult non-ICU beds are occupied, based on Oregon Health Authority data provided.

In the past month, COVID-19 hospitalizations in Oregon have more than doubled, with 345 people hospitalized with the virus as of Tuesday.

Legislature won’t have oversight of governor’s powers

■ House decides not to consider bill

By Andrew Selsky
Associated Press

SALEM — Members of the Oregon House narrowly defeated a move on Tuesday to consider a bill that would give the Legislature oversight of the governor’s emergency powers, enacted most recently to address the coronavirus pandemic.

The motion by Rep. Rick Lewis, R-Silverton, who along with a Democrat is one of the two chief sponsors of the bill, to pull the bill from the rules committee and fast-track a House floor vote was defeated with 28 votes against and 27 in favor.

Several Democrats were among those in favor, as were all Republicans who were present. The other chief co-sponsor of the bill is Rep. Marty Wilde, D-Eugene.

The House Republican caucus said in a statement after the vote that it wants “to make the governor accountable to the Legislature.”

The bill requires that declarations and extensions of states of emergency under certain statutes be accompanied by written explanations. It also provides that, after termination of a state of emergency, the governor may not declare another state of emergency for the same purpose unless the Legislature authorizes it.

In its statement, the Republican caucus complained that Gov. Kate Brown, in unilaterally extending her own emergency powers, has “the ability to issue shutdowns without involving another governing body.”

Last week, the Democratic governor announced that she was moving 15 counties into the extreme risk category for the coronavirus, which imposes restrictions that include banning indoor restaurant dining. Some of the state’s biggest cities, including Portland, Salem, Bend and Eugene, are in the counties that on Friday became classified in the most dire category.

The bill remains alive in the rules committee, where the committee chair can schedule it for a public hearing at any time before the end of the session.

Republican lawmakers in the Legislature controlled by Democrats have sponsored several other measures aimed at curtailing the governor’s emergency powers.

PARTIES

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Some residents called the Eugene Police Department and officers assisted the university in dispersing the partygoers. Callers reported loud music and students urinating in the front yard of one

home where one student witness snapped a photo that circulated widely on social media, The Register Guard reported.

One woman fell off the roof and was taken to the hospital by ambulance.

Student Joseph Hill, who took the picture, said there was a party

of similar size a few nights before at the same address.

Hill’s Twitter post quickly got a lot of reaction online, from students, alumni and professors who commented that they were disappointed in these students, some who they recognized.

“There were a lot of those

photo-truther people,” Hill told the newspaper. “Even now there are people still tweeting and saying, ‘Oh, this is from 2015.’ I was pretty shocked at how many people were insisting that it was an old photo, and people were able to disprove them pretty quickly in the comments.”

But not everyone was so defensive, he said.

“There’s also been a lot of students reacting saying they’re disappointed in their peers. There’s some people even being really dramatic and saying, ‘If you’re in the photo I will not be friends with you,’ and stuff like that.”



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