

At least a dozen US universities reinstate mask mandates as COVID cases rise

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27 April 2022

Colleges and universities across the United States, particularly in the Northeast, have reinstated mask mandates and returned to online learning in response to a recent surge of COVID-19 infections on campuses, marking the third straight academic year disrupted by the coronavirus.

Schools in New York, Washington D.C., Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Texas have announced they will again require face coverings in classrooms or certain indoor spaces, with Howard University moving to remote learning to combat the spread of the virus.

Most US universities dropped mask mandates leading up to spring break, following a winter surge fueled by the Omicron variant. But several parts of the country have seen another surge in cases and hospitalizations in recent weeks, as the BA.2 subvariant of Omicron drives another wave of infections and illness.

Four schools in New York state reinstated their indoor mask mandates in recent weeks. Syracuse University, located in a county with one of the largest surges of infections in the US, announced it would once again require masks in classrooms on Monday.

Earlier this month, Columbia University in New York City announced students would be required to wear non-cloth masks in classrooms for the remainder of the spring semester. The university directly cited the city's uptick in cases and its own increasing test positivity rate in the decision.

Barnard College, a women's school affiliated with Columbia, also reimposed its indoor mask mandate due to a spike in cases since it lifted the rule at the end of March.

The University of Rochester announced on April 15 that it would reintroduce its indoor mask mandate policy for all of its campuses and properties in response

to a spike in cases that was "straining the capacity" of quarantine and isolation spaces on its campuses.

"The trending high numbers of positive student COVID cases at the University in recent days make it in everyone's best interest to take the step of re-masking indoors right now," the university administration said in a statement.

Four universities in Washington D.C. have also reinstated mask mandates following high transmission rates in the region and significant case increases on their campuses. The city's COVID-19 infection rate has more than doubled in April.

Howard University students are now required to wear masks for all indoor settings and outdoor group settings until the end of the spring semester. Furthermore, the university announced many undergraduate courses would switch to remote learning during the last days of classes and final exams would be conducted virtually.

George Washington University also revived its mask mandate for all campus facilities earlier this month, noting the mandate would extend through the rest of its spring semester, exam period and commencement. American University reinstated its indoor mask mandate for all campus buildings and Georgetown is requiring indoor masking on two of its campuses.

The city of Philadelphia recently revived its mask mandate, prompting the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University to require indoor masking again starting Monday. Although the city prematurely ended the mandate Thursday, the colleges have kept the mandates in place.

In Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University announced it would begin testing all undergraduate students twice a week, noting a steep rise in cases. The school also said masks would be required in classrooms and group settings like residence hall common areas.

In Houston, Rice University announced earlier this month that students should resume wearing masks in classrooms and canceled large campus parties, citing an uptick in cases on campus.

The uptick in COVID-19 infections across US schools and campuses is a direct product of deliberate policies of the American ruling class, which seeks to normalize sickness and death. In February, the Biden administration urged states to reclassify what qualify as COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths by using the artificial distinction between those hospitalized “with COVID-19” and those hospitalized “from COVID-19,” a far-right talking point since early on in the pandemic.

It was also in February that nearly every state began ending whatever mask mandates were still in place. Multiple states slashed the number of public COVID-19 testing sites, driving testing to its lowest level since last summer. Federal pandemic funding also dried up in March, meaning uninsured people now have to pay \$100 for a PCR test.

The sabotage of any serious public health response to the pandemic, carried out by the American capitalist class and its political representatives, has needlessly killed over 1 million Americans and potentially exposed many more to the debilitating effects of Long COVID.

The fight to close schools to in-person instruction and save lives is inseparable from the growing class struggle in the US and internationally. Stopping the spread of infections and death requires a globally coordinated movement to employ all available public health measures to eliminate the deadly disease.

On May 1, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is hosting an International May Day Online Rally to provide the global working class with a fighting strategy to stop the pandemic and the drive to world war. All students, young people, workers and professionals throughout the world are encouraged to attend and join the fight for a socialist program.



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