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## Restrictions, not risk: New Utah executive orders update COVID-19 phase phrasing, school face mask guidelines

SALT LAKE CITY — On Friday, Gov. Gary Herbert issued two executive orders addressing key parts of the state's [novel coronavirus](#) response: one clarifying the [school face mask requirement](#) and the other adjusting terminology for the [color-coded reopening guidelines](#).

The changes come after Herbert previously addressed both issues at coronavirus briefings. Friday's orders formalized and officially adopted the changes.

## Clarifying face masks for students

Utah students going back to school next week can no longer find a loophole to wearing mandatory face masks.

[Friday's new executive order](#) clarifies what type of face masks are required for students: it must cover the nose and mouth without see-through openings and must secure under the chin while snugly fitted along the face.

The updated order also said even in situations when students can physically distance themselves, face masks should still be worn with limited exceptions. Students must wear a mask while on school property, including a school bus.

Students are not allowed to wear face shields in lieu of a mask but can wear a shield with a mask.

“Recent studies are showing that not all face coverings provide equal protection against [COVID-19](#),” Herbert said in a news release. “As we send our children back to school, we need to make sure that they are wearing face masks that actually reduce the spread of coronavirus in the air.”

Face shields can only be worn without a mask when “the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication,” namely for deaf or hard of hearing students who are participating in speech therapy, the order states.

## Reframing how Utahns view COVID-19 restrictions

Additionally on Friday, Herbert issued [another executive order](#) changing the state's language in its [phased reopening guidelines](#) called the Utah Leads Together Plan.

Now, instead of being called “risk levels,” the guidelines will be referred to as “levels of restriction.”

In a press briefing last month, Herbert said the [state made a mistake](#) in its messaging, allowing people to become “cavalier” about the pandemic.

The state's color-coded system labeled its coronavirus recovery phases by color and risk level: red for the high risk phase, orange as moderate risk, yellow as low risk and green as normal to no risk.

With Friday's language change, the colors are now framed in terms of restrictions — not general risk of the coronavirus, thus letting Utahns know they should still adhere to public health recommendations and take necessary precautions at every level.

[At the July 9 briefing](#), Herbert noted such precautions, like wearing a face mask and social distancing, might be even more crucial in less restrictive areas as people will likely be interacting more with others.

Friday's order also formalized a policy Herbert announced last week, [allowing local cities and counties to adopt mask mandates](#) without state approval.

This week, [Bluff became the latest municipality](#) in Utah to enact a [face-covering mandate](#), thus joining Grand County, Logan, Springdale, Salt Lake County and Summit County.

## Coronavirus in Utah

[As of Friday](#), Utah health officials estimated there were 8,937 active COVID-19 cases in the state with 171 hospitalizations.

Since the pandemic began 589,817 tests have been conducted with a 7.8% positivity rate, health officials reported.

To date, there have been 45,976 total confirmed cases, with 2,744 total hospitalizations and 360 total deaths from COVID-19.

An estimated 36,679 cases are considered recovered by the state's health department.

According to [USA Facts data](#) provided by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), 46.6% of the state's cases were concentrated in Salt Lake County as of Friday — a decrease from the [50.6% reported on June 17](#).

Utah County has the state's second highest number of cases at 19.9% — an increase from the 17.9% reported on June 17.

As of Friday, Salt Lake City was the only area in the state still under orange restrictions. The remainder of the state has been moved to yellow with a select number of counties moved to green and under minimal restrictions.

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