

Group of Louisiana legislators calls for end to state's COVID-19 restrictions

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A group of Louisiana legislators is asking Gov. John Bel Edwards to lift rules meant to control the spread of COVID-19.

Rep. Rick Edmonds, a Baton Rouge Republican, sent the Democratic governor a letter making the request, which is endorsed by 33 Republicans, including 30 members of the state House and three state senators. The Louisiana Legislature has 144 members.

Edwards issued [an executive order](#) this week that loosened the state's COVID-19 restrictions, but businesses and events still are under capacity limitations and a statewide mask mandate remains in place. Meanwhile, the governors of [Texas](#) and Mississippi announced this week they would lift all COVID-19 mitigation measures in their states.

"Our businesses, both large and small, will continue to fight against COVID-19," the letter read. "We are certain that their continued commitment and direction as it relates to capacity issues and enforcement of other virus safety precautions will be done safely and professionally without any additional government mandates. With access to vaccinations on the rise, hospitalizations on the decline, and a variety of better treatment options, now is time to end the mandates."

Ending the mitigation measures would go against the federal government's recommendations. Edwards largely has followed federal guidelines regarding COVID-19 since the pandemic began, spanning the administrations of President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump.

Edwards hasn't read the letter, but he has consistently relied on recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the Louisiana Department of Health, and other medical experts, none of whom have recommended removing the mask mandate, spokeswoman Shauna Sanford said by email.

When [he announced](#) the less restrictive mitigation rules that would be in place over the next four weeks Tuesday, Edwards pointed to [factors](#) that indicate Louisiana is making progress in getting the pandemic under control. For example, hospitalizations and the percentage of COVID-19 tests that come back positive are both about one-third what they were during the state's post-holiday surge in early January.

Edwards, however, also noted the presence of new, more dangerous variants of the coronavirus that causes the illness. While more than a million COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered in the state, [according to the most-recent report from the Louisiana Department of Health](#), only about 405,000 people out of a population of more than 4.6 million have been fully vaccinated.

"We're certainly moving in the right direction," Edwards said. "We still have a lot of work to do before we get out of this pandemic."

Edwards has imposed the mitigation mandates through executive orders, which has been a sticking point for many legislators who want more of a say in the decisions. A majority of House members signed a petition to suspend the rules, but [a judge ruled](#) the state law the members attempted to invoke unconstitutional.

That decision was appealed to the Louisiana Supreme Court, which [sent the case back](#) to the district court. The higher court ruled that the lower court should have decided whether House members fulfilled the statute's requirements

before ruling on its constitutionality.