



JOINT LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

NC Department of Health and Human Services

COVID Update

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Secretary

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Where We Are

We have entered a new phase of the pandemic:

- ▶ **Vaccinations and boosters provide strong protection against severe illness, hospitalization and death.**
- ▶ **Treatments are available and effective against severe illness.**
- ▶ **There is greater immunity in the community.**
- ▶ **We can therefore pivot from tools that mitigate collective risk to those that mitigate individual risk.**

New Mask Guidance

- **On March 7th, low risk settings, including schools, moved to mask-optional policies**
- **Everyone 2 and over can wear a mask, if they want an added layer of protection.**
- **Higher-risk settings, e.g., health care facilities, long term care should follow CDC/CMS guidance on masking**

Guiding Principles Driving Forward

- **Prioritizing equity**
- **Empowering individuals**
- **Maintaining health system capacity**
- **Collaborating with local partners**

Key Metrics for the Next Phase

Rationale	Metric
Early Warning	Wastewater Surveillance
Risk of Exposure	COVID-Like Illness
Community Impact	CDC Community Level
Capacity	Hospital Admissions
Immunity in the Community	Boosters
Spread and Populations Impacted	Case Trends
Severity and Transmissibility	Prevalence of Variants

NC DHHS State of Emergency Flexibilities

- **Allows health care licensure and regulation flexibility**
 - Allows health care facility and EMS agencies to increase staff and other resources to manage surge
- **Allows state health director to issue standing orders for testing and treatment.**
 - Impacts the ability to continue COVID testing in schools and by smaller local health departments

Recover Stronger

*These priorities and our work across the department are grounded in **whole-person health**, driven by **equity**, and responsive to the lessons learned responding to the greatest health crisis in more than a generation.*

Behavioral Health & Resilience



We need to offer services further upstream to build resiliency, invest in coordinated systems of care that **make mental health services easy to access** when and where they are needed and **reduce the stigma** around accessing these services.

Child & Family Wellbeing



We will work to ensure that North Carolina's children grow up safe, healthy and thriving in nurturing and resilient families and communities. **Investing in families and children's healthy development builds more resilient families, better educational outcomes and, in the long term, a stronger society.**

Strong & Inclusive Workforce



We will work to strengthen the **workforce that supports early learning, health and wellness by delivering services** to North Carolina. And we will take action to be an equitable workplace that lives its values and ensure that all people have the opportunity to be fully included members of their communities.

The health insurance coverage gap coupled with insufficient access to affordable care disproportionately impacts Historically Marginalized Populations who have also experienced worse outcomes than others under COVID-19. Medicaid expansion would help close the health insurance coverage gap.