

## NEWS

**Federal Mask Rule Dropped for Travel on U.S. Planes, Buses & Trains**

By Christina Ianzito

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The Department of Justice (DOJ) said on Wednesday that it will appeal the ruling that overturned the longtime COVID-19 mandate that face masks be worn on public forms of transportation and in transportation hubs.

Federal Judge Kathryn Kimball Mizelle in Florida had ruled on Monday that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) mask-wearing mandate was an overreach of the agency's authority and dismissed the mandate as "unlawful."

The DOJ's move came at the request of the CDC, which said in a statement: "It is CDC's continuing assessment that at this time an order requiring masking in the indoor transportation corridor remains necessary for the public health." It added, "CDC will continue to monitor public health conditions to determine whether such an order remains necessary. CDC believes this is a lawful order, well within CDC's legal authority to protect public health."

In response to Monday's decision, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is no longer enforcing the longtime mask rule, which applied to passengers and workers on planes, trains and buses, as well as in U.S. airports. It may do so again, however, if the DOJ moves to block the judge's order.

Last month the CDC announced that most people were safe to go maskless in many other indoor settings, but recommended that "everyone ages 2 years and older should properly wear a well-fitting mask indoors in public in areas where the COVID-19 Community Level is high, regardless of vaccination status." The agency maintains a color-coded, county-by-county map to track COVID-19 data, including hospital capacity and the number of new COVID-19 cases in an area. (Most of the country is now at a green, or low, level, despite a slight uptick in new in-



fections.)

What this means for travelers

Though some travelers cheered when the mask news was announced by some pilots mid-flight on Monday, travelers are likely to face a patchwork of requirements, depending on where and how they are traveling.

It's still up to individual airlines, bus lines, transit agencies and other transportation entities to decide whether to keep their mask mandates in place — but many, including Amtrak, Lyft and Uber, dropped them soon after the ruling. Both Uber and Lyft also announced that passengers can again ride in the front seat, which was banned during the pandemic.

The Washington, D.C., Metro system has dropped its mask requirement, but New York City is still mandating face coverings on its subways, buses and trains. Philadelphia International Airport is also requiring masks inside its terminals.

All major airlines announced within hours that passengers and employees no longer need to wear face masks. Delta added that they "may continue wearing

masks if they so choose." The airline's chief health officer, Henry Ting, M.D., said, "Wearing a well-fitting mask — such as a KN95 — protects the wearer, even if others around them are not wearing masks." Other medical experts have agreed.

Delta also acknowledges the confusion this new ruling may cause, as people "may be receiving this information at different times." The company therefore asks passengers to "remember to show understanding and patience with others who may not be aware enforcement is no longer required."

Disputes over mask wearing have been one reason for passengers' unruly and sometimes violent behavior going through security and in the air. From the middle of January 2021 through Dec. 21, 2021, there were 5,779 reports of unruly passenger behavior, at times involving physical assault, according to the Federal Aviation Administration. Many airlines stopped serving alcohol on board for many months during the pandemic, concerned that inebriation was fueling bad behavior.

How to protect yourself

If you are at higher risk for complications from COVID-19, the best way to protect yourself from infection when others are unmasked is to wear a well-fitted respirator mask like an N95 or KN95.

As the name suggests, these masks are at least 95 percent effective at filtering out virus-sized particles, including the virus that causes COVID-19, when worn correctly. A study published by the CDC in February found that people who wore an N95 or KN95 mask in indoor public settings were 83 percent less likely to test positive for COVID-19 than those who wore no mask.

"If you're in a crowded place where there are people who maybe have COVID, wearing an N95 mask means you're cleaning the air much better right before you breathe it in," M. Patricia Fabian, an associate professor in the Department of Environmental Health at the Boston University School of Public Health, told AARP in a previous interview.

A surgical mask is another option that provides more protection than a cloth mask, although it's considered less effective than respirators.

Just make sure your mask fits well: It should be snug over your nose and mouth and should form a tight seal, without any gaps along the edges or around the nose. Don't have an N95? Your local pharmacy or health clinic may offer them for free — you can check the CDC's website to find a list of participating pharmacies near you.

Traveling by air? Airlines have touted the safety of flying, equipping their planes with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, which remove at least 99.97 percent of dust, pollen, mold, bacteria and airborne particles as small as 0.3 microns, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Editor's note: This story has been updated with new developments.

**Equitable Recovery Commission Issues Recommended Framework for Chattanooga's American Rescue Plan Investments**

Mayor Tim Kelly to consider commission's recommendations and begin taking next steps on Friday

Chattanooga, Tenn. (Tuesday, April 26) — The Chattanooga Equitable Recovery Commission on Monday presented its recommended framework to Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly for the investment of \$30 million from the American Rescue Plan.

The commission developed the framework by using strategic priority areas and incorporating examples of the investment types that members believe can help stimulate long-term prosperity in the city, filling gaps that are remnants of an imperfect legacy. In its work, the commission acknowledged that some of the city's communities have been historically neglected and require intentional focus and investments — investments that can lead to a more just and prosperous Chattanooga. While \$30 million is not enough to bridge all gaps that exist in Chattanooga, it still represents a significant opportunity to fund transformative projects, the commission said. And over the past four months, members of the commission have engaged in many hours of robust discussions on how to best invest in an equitable, robust recovery.

In its framework, the Equitable Recovery Commission first analyzed Mayor Tim Kelly's One Chattanooga strategy, and from there recommended a single goal — catalyzing the economic growth of the Black community — serve as its primary objective.

"Our research showed that the Black community in Chattanooga was

disproportionately impacted by the negative effects of COVID-19," said Commissioner Lakweshia Ewing. "We appreciate Mayor Kelly's continued commitment to honoring his campaign promises by investing \$30 million of ARPA funding into community-based initiatives that address the inequities that have existed for generations."

As the main objective, or "hub" of this investment framework, the commission recommended that every application for funding should incorporate this goal within both its scope of work, as well as in its impact.

To help spur economic growth in Chattanooga's neighborhoods, the commission recommended funding projects which fall into the following four priority areas:

- Ensure accessible housing for all Chattanoogaans
- Build a universal path to early learning and provide high-quality child-care
- Close the gaps in public health
- Build a competitive regional economy

"I want to first acknowledge the hard work by the members of the Equitable Recovery Commission, who took on the tough discussions, put in the long hours and performed the diligent research required to produce a framework of this magnitude," said Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly. "My team and I look forward to reviewing it and leveraging it to inform our notice of funding opportunity later this week."

Next steps include a formal notice of funding opportunity, technical assis-

tance for applicants, and final application deadlines.

- The formal notice of funding opportunity will be made available at [Recovery.Chattanooga.gov](https://Recovery.Chattanooga.gov) on **Friday, April 29**.
- The city will host a virtual applicant information session on **May 3 at 1 p.m.** to provide technical assistance for applicants.
- Register at <https://tinyurl.com/AR-PATA>
- The session will be recorded and posted online to [Recovery.Chattanooga.gov](https://Recovery.Chattanooga.gov)
- An additional in-person applicant information session for technical assistance is scheduled for **May 9 at 5 p.m.** at a location that will be announced on [Recovery.Chattanooga.gov](https://Recovery.Chattanooga.gov).
- The final date to submit applications is currently set for **June 3 at 5 p.m.**
- Notices of intent to award to be released in **early July**.
- **The ARP spending plan is contingent on City Council approval.**

The Equitable Recovery Commission was established to ensure Chattanooga's fund allocation process



is administered with integrity and accountability, through an equity lens. The Commission was composed of six members selected by the Mayor's Office, three members nominated by the Urban League of Greater Chattanooga, and three members nominated by the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce.

**75-Year Old Black Grandma from North Carolina Makes History, Graduates From Shaw University**

Nationwide — Rebecca Inge, a 75-year-old woman from Raleigh, North Carolina, has graduated from Shaw University, an HBCU. She began pursuing her college degree there 57-years ago.

In 1965, Inge, who was then living in Sanford, Florida, said she left home to pursue a college education at Shaw University.

"I always dreamed of going to med school because I was sick a lot as a child. I dreamed of being a surgeon," Inge told WRAL, adding that she was also interested in engineering.

At that time, she worked in the college's cafeteria to support her own financial needs while studying. However, she had to put her dreams on hold when she got married and gave birth to her daughter.

Her daughter Marisa Ratliff Dunston, who is now retired after years of serving in the U.S. military, said her mother sacrificed a lot for her family. She said, "She put her life on hold so that I could finish my 21 years, all of my education so that I could be successful today."

During those previous years, Inge had different jobs including working at NASA during the first space shuttle mission and



serving as a safety instructor at Disney World. When her husband died in 2015, she usually stayed with her daughter.

Recently, she decided to continue pursuing her college degree by re-enrolling at Shaw University. There had been a few hurdles due to the huge year gap but everything worked out in the end also with the help of her daughter.

Now, Inge is preparing for her commencement ceremonies on May 8. She is excited to ultimately fulfill her dream.

"You gotta live 'til you die, so why not be happy doing something that makes you happy and get involved?" she said.

(Source: BlackNews.com)

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