

As the number of coronavirus cases in Arkansas exceeds a total of 31,000, Arkansans will soon be required to wear a mask due to a statewide mandate.

The mandate, announced today, (Thursday) goes into effect on Monday and requires the wearing of facemasks both indoors and outdoors when six feet of distance cannot be properly maintained.

The announcement comes as the state saw 817 new cases of the coronavirus, bringing the state's total to 31,114. Of those total cases 6,578 are considered active. The death toll from COVID-19 increased by 6, for a total of 341. Hospitalizations and those on a ventilator also increased to 470 and 101 respectively, marking the first time the number of patients needing a ventilator has exceeded 100.

Gov. Asa Hutchinson, speaking during his daily briefing on the pandemic said the rising number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths "speak for themselves" and is one reason why he is issuing the mandate.

NEWS08**:16****"...this fight"**

Hutchinson previously had been against a statewide mandate, preferring what he's called a method of education and personal responsibility from Arkansans.

The executive order does list a number of exceptions for the mask order, including children under the age of 10, when eating or drinking or while attending worship services.

Another exception is in "counties where the Department of Health has certified that risk of community transmission is low." While Hutchinson says the specifics of that exception are still being "fine-tuned," counties can be exempt if there are no new positive cases for 28 days in a row.

NEWS09**:24****"...in their area"**

Those found in violation of the order can be charged with a misdemeanor and could be fined an amount between \$100 and \$500.