

Arkansans across the state will soon be required to wear masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19 due to a mandate issued by the governor today (Thursday). This comes as the state experienced its third highest daily increase in new coronavirus cases since the beginning of the pandemic.

Arkansas saw 817 new cases of the coronavirus today (Thursday), bringing the state's total to 31,114. The death toll rose by 6 to 341.

Gov. Asa Hutchinson announced the mandate during his daily briefing. Though previously against the idea of a statewide directive, he cited multiple reasons why he made the decision to issue the executive order, including the increasing number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths in the state, listening to state legislators' concerns, and the upcoming school year.

NEWS06**:22****“...for them”**

The order goes into effect on Monday and will expire once the state of emergency concerning the pandemic ends. Currently that public health emergency is set to expire in just over two weeks, though it could be extended again.

The mandate requires all Arkansans, with some exceptions, to wear a mask when in an indoor setting with people not from their household and cannot maintain a distance of more than six feet. It also requires the wearing of masks outdoors when proper social distancing cannot be achieved.

When asked what caused him to change his mind concerning a statewide mandate, Hutchinson said he originally resisted a mandate because he believed it to be unenforceable and not accepted by the public.

NEWS07**:15****“...of industry”**

Unlike the previous model ordinance that the state recently allowed cities and counties to issue, violation of the statewide order can result in a misdemeanor offense and a fine between \$100 and \$500.