

DougCo health board rescinds COVID-19 order



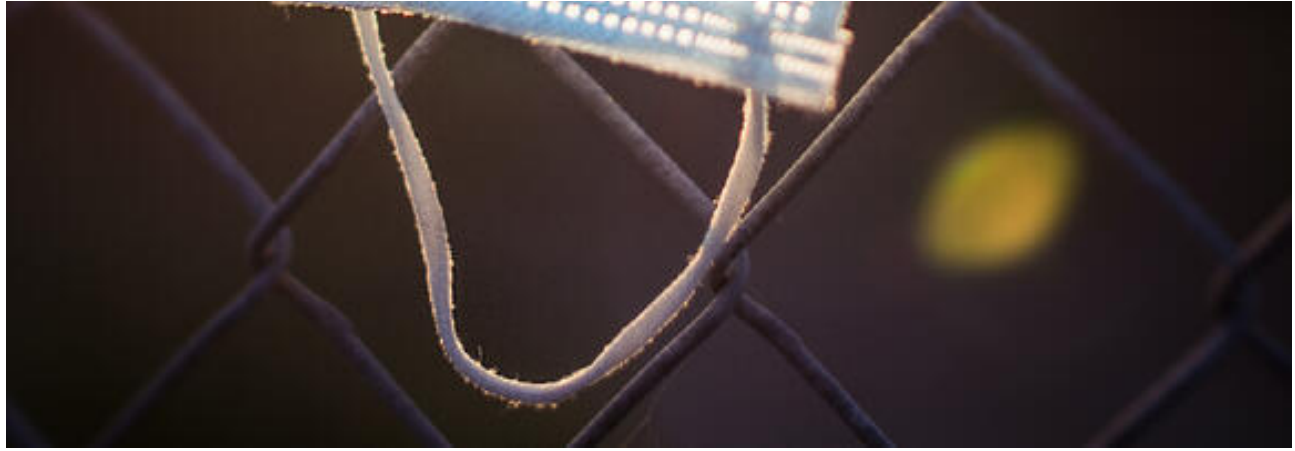


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By Mike McKibbin / NewsBreak Denver / Oct. 19, 2022

[DOUGLAS COUNTY, COLO.] — The Douglas County Board of Health last week rescinded the only public health order it has issued.

The Oct. 8, 2021, order exempted "certain individuals" from then-imposed statewide face mask requirements. It also prevented quarantining anyone in the county due to actual, suspected, or potential exposure to COVID-19 if the individual was asymptomatic.

The board modified the order on Nov. 12, 2021, to exempt the Douglas County School District. It would have expired at the end of the year.

Pandemic over?

"We're out of the pandemic, it's done, it's over," said board president Doug Benevento, a former state health department director. "It's time to move on. This resolution officially acknowledges that."

Alternate board member Don Parrot challenged the notion the pandemic was over.

"The (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) are still recommending people like me get more boosters," he said. "So, if it's not an issue, why do I need another booster? It's not all that clear in my mind that it's all over with."

County resident John Fielding told the board he agreed the pandemic had passed.

"But I don't think Douglas County should be the first county in the state to officially say that," he added. "The mainstream media blames this board for the demise of the Tri-County Health Department, and if we have a bad flu season, they can say the county acted too early. That could haunt this board and hurt your credibility."

Health officials have advised people to get annual flu shots and a COVID booster shot. Fielding suggested the board wait until the number of flu cases emerges.

New normal with COVID

"I think we're moving toward an ongoing COVID policy or posture in Douglas County, the U.S., and the world," said County Commissioner George Teal, who sits on the board. "If we don't say it's over, we can't move forward with a recognition of an ongoing COVID policy or posture."

Benevento noted a difference between a pandemic and the COVID-19 virus.

"A pandemic is a legally defined term, and I just don't think the numbers (of COVID cases) justify calling it a pandemic anymore," he stated. "This resolution doesn't say COVID is over. COVID is around and it will continue to be around. I think this takes a step toward a post-pandemic world and it doesn't diminish the fact that there are still communicable diseases around."

Commissioner Lora Thomas, who also sits on the board, agreed the pandemic is over and noted President Joe Biden had recently stated the same conclusion.

Health Department Executive Director Michael Hill said only one person could officially declare the COVID-19 pandemic over.

"That's Dr. (Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general) at the World Health Organization," he said. "He's the one that declared it a worldwide pandemic, and he's the only one that can declare it over."

"How we respond to the pandemic is still up to us," Benevento responded. "We're allowed to have our opinion, and here in Douglas County we're done with it."

State COVID orders remain

According to a Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment spokeswoman, the board's action does not affect the department's five current and updated COVID-related statewide public health orders. Orders issued by the state and local health authorities are considered law within their jurisdictions.

Current and updated state orders deal with COVID-19 prevention and response at skilled nursing facilities, assisted living residences, intermediate care facilities and group homes; hospital and laboratory reporting; testing and treatment; vaccine access and data reporting.

The county resolution also established a procedure for Hill to issue any future public health orders.

