



## **Frequently Asked Questions: Public Health Emergency Declaration**

### **What is a public health emergency declaration?**

When there is an infectious disease causing a significant outbreak, public health officials and experts may decide to declare a Public Health Emergency. A public health emergency declaration gives the federal government flexibility to respond to the emergency by making sure there is access to resources like tests and treatments. In March 2020, a public health emergency was declared for COVID-19. Because of this declaration, the government was able to make COVID-19 tests, treatment, and vaccines available and was able to make accessing some types of care, like telehealth, easier.

A public health emergency lasts 90 days, but it can be extended by the government. The federal COVID-19 public health emergency will end on May 11, 2023.

### **If the federal public health emergency is over, does that mean COVID-19 is gone?**

Ending the public health emergency declaration does not mean that COVID-19 is gone. Similar to the flu and other infectious diseases, it is important to stay up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines, to get tested if you have been exposed or have symptoms, and to stay home when you are sick.

### **Do I still have to wear a mask when the federal public health emergency ends?**

RIDOH recommends that people wear masks when their COVID-19 community levels are high. To know when your community level is high, visit the [COVID-19 datahub](https://covid.ri.gov/data) (covid.ri.gov/data) and look for your county (to learn more about COVID-19 Community Levels, visit the [CDC Community Levels page](#)).

For more information about masking to prevent COVID-19, visit [covid.ri.gov/masks](https://covid.ri.gov/masks).

Some settings may have their own policies require staff or visitors to wear masks.

Additionally, Rhode Island requires healthcare workers in licensed healthcare facilities, who are not up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines, to wear masks when cases of COVID-19 are equal to or greater than 50 cases per 100,000 people per week (case metrics are posted in Rhode Island's [COVID-19 datahub](#)). While this regulation is currently under review at RIDOH, the regulation is not impacted by the end of the federal public health emergency.

### **What happens to my Medicaid coverage once the federal public health emergency ends?**

Before COVID-19, people enrolled in Medicaid had their eligibility for Medicaid reviewed once a year. This process is called "renewal" or "redetermination." During the federal public health emergency, people enrolled in Medicaid kept their coverage and did not have to go through an annual renewal process. Beginning April 1, 2023, the Medicaid eligibility renewal process will begin again. To learn more, visit <https://staycovered.ri.gov/>

### **During COVID-19, I could get my prescriptions through telehealth. Can I still do that when the federal public health emergency ends?**

During the federal public health emergency, providers were allowed to write prescriptions for controlled substances using telemedicine. When the federal public health emergency ends on May 11, 2023, in-person visits may be required for prescriptions for controlled substances.