

# Indiana Republicans vow to resist federal vaccine mandates

Top Hoosier Republicans are pushing back on Democratic President Joe Biden's efforts to bring a close to the COVID-19 pandemic by boosting vaccination rates across the country.

Gov. Eric Holcomb and Attorney General Todd Rokita said Friday they believe the president has gone too far by pledging to use federal workplace safety regulations to potentially penalize large companies that fail to ensure their workers either are vaccinated against COVID-19 or regularly tested for the virus.

Holcomb said he agrees with Biden the vaccine "is the number one tool that will protect us and our loved ones against COVID-19" and the vaccine will "end the pandemic."

But the two-term state chief executive also said he strongly believes "it's not the state or federal government's role to issue a vaccine mandate upon citizens and private businesses."

"I believe it is fundamentally a citizen's right to choose

whether or not to get the vaccine. While I wish everyone would get the vaccine, we are a country built on this exact type of freedom," Holcomb said.

"The announcement from President Biden is a bridge too far. Private businesses should be able to look at their own mission, their staff and their goals and make the decision best for them that will keep their doors open."

Rokita, a Munster native, said the attorneys in his office, along with Republican attorneys general in other states, already are reviewing potential legal actions "to stand against these authoritarian actions by the Biden administration."

"We will be prepared to file suit if Biden seeks illegal actions restricting Hoosiers' liberties," Rokita said.

It's not clear on what basis the state would have standing to challenge the president's directives, since states and local governments, as employers, are not bound by workplace safety regulations issued by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Biden's proposed OSHA rule would direct private employers with more than 100 workers to require their employees — approximately 80 million Americans — to be vaccinated or tested weekly for COVID-19.

Another 20 American million workers at health facilities that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid dollars, federal government employees, and businesses contracting with the federal government also would have to be vaccinated — with no alternative for weekly COVID-19 testing.

"We've been patient, but our patience is wearing thin, and your refusal has cost all of us," Biden said Thursday to the minority of Americans who continue refusing to get vaccinated, causing COVID-19 hospitalizations to again overwhelm the nation's health care systems and preventing Americans from accessing other types of needed medical care.

"What more is there to wait for? What more do you need to see?" Biden asked. "We've made vaccinations free, safe and convenient. The vaccine has FDA approval. Over 200 million Americans have gotten at least one shot."

In Indiana, a total of 3.15 million Hoosiers 12 and older are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, or 53.7% of the eligible population, according to the State Department of Health.

Lauren Ganapini, executive director of the Indiana Democratic Party, said Holcomb helped get a majority of Hoosiers protected against COVID-19 by leading the initial statewide vaccination effort.

In recent months, however, she said the governor essentially has disappeared on issues relating to COVID-19 prevention, noting that as of Friday Holcomb hasn't held a formal COVID-19 media briefing in 164 days.

"Hoosiers have grown tired of a partisan, vocal minority holding our families back from returning to a form of normalcy not seen in almost two years. Now is the moment to stop checking partisan boxes, and it's up to Indiana's CEO — Eric Holcomb — to do his job," Ganapini said.

"President Biden provided a blueprint once again to help Indiana put COVID-19 in the rearview mirror. If Gov. Holcomb refuses to show leadership on the pandemic, he'll show he cares more about the Indiana Republicans' extreme partisanship and future ambitions than saving lives."

State health officials reported 5,476 Hoosiers tested positive for COVID-19 Thursday and 22 additional Hoosiers died due to the coronavirus — bringing Indiana's COVID-19 death toll to 14,753 in the past 19 months, an average of 778 Hoosier deaths each month.

In addition, a total of 2,617 Hoosiers were hospitalized Thursday because of COVID-19. That's an increase of 104 hospitalized Hoosiers compared to Tuesday, and just a quarter less than the previous peak of 3,460 hospitalizations recorded on Nov. 30, 2020.

Unvaccinated individuals account for nearly all of Indiana's COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths, according to the Department of Health.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, unvaccinated individuals have comprised 99.28% of Indiana's COVID-19 infections, 99.983% of COVID-19 hospitalizations, and 99.995% of COVID-19 deaths, records show.

The free COVID-19 vaccine is available without an appointment at 1,148 locations statewide, including most retail pharmacies, health clinics and hospitals.

A full list of vaccine sites is online at [ourshot.in.gov](https://ourshot.in.gov).

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