



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gov. Lee Signs Executive Order Giving Parents Ability to Opt Out of School Mask Mandates

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Today, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee signed [Executive Order 84](#) to give parents the ability to opt their child out of a local mask mandate enacted by a school or health board.

Gov. Lee's remarks as prepared for delivery are below:

Thanks for joining today. Before we cover an important COVID-19 announcement, I want to express a heavy heart regarding the tragedy unfolding in Afghanistan. Over the years, many Tennesseans were deployed and some lost their lives to fight the War on Terror and create stability in the region.

The sacrifices of American troops are not in vain. My hope is that wisdom will prevail in the United States' response. I hope you will join me in praying for the people of Afghanistan.

Let me start off this portion of the briefing by saying that we're facing a significant challenge in our hospitals as a result of the increase in COVID cases.

The most important tool we have to fight the pandemic is a vaccine. I encourage Tennesseans who have not been vaccinated to talk to their doctor to consider getting vaccinated and to make an informed decision. I worked with my doctor and received the vaccine and it has been a dependable tool to keep me healthy.

The government will not mandate or require anyone to get a vaccine but I encourage you to consider it for yourself. It's widely available, it's effective and it's free.

More and more Tennesseans are choosing to be vaccinated, almost 100,000 per week and this is good news for the health of our state.

If you do become sick with COVID, early intervention is important - please call your doctor to ask about treatments. Monoclonal antibodies are widely available at 72 centers across our state and are highly effective if used early. Your doctor can advise you on the best route for you.

I want to acknowledge the frustration and fear that many are feeling - fear of COVID and its effects on your family, fear of government intervention and its effect, and frustration over everything from masks to information that changes by the day.

Right now, some of the greatest frustration is occurring in our K-12 schools, especially around the issue of mask mandates. While local decision-making is important, individual decision-making by a parent on issues regarding the health and well-being of their child is the most important.

No one cares about the health and well-being of a child more than a parent. I am signing an executive order today that allows parents to opt their children out of a school mask mandate if either a school board or health board enacts one over a district.

Districts will make the decision they believe are best for their schools, but parents will have the ultimate decision-making for their individual child's health and well-being. I will not be calling a special session at this time.

Our hospitals are struggling under the weight of COVID but those hospital beds are filled with adults. Requiring parents to make their children wear masks to solve an adult problem is in my view the wrong approach.

Our hospitals and our health care workers are doing everything they can to take care of Tennesseans. That's why I signed an executive order last week giving them maximum flexibility to do their jobs. My administration continues to provide funding and staffing support to ensure there are no barriers to hospitals facing strain. I commend them once again for their incredible work and service to Tennesseans.

While we deal with this issue, it remains important that we keep our schools open and in person as we've seen the devastating loss of progress our kids have had academically when schools were remote or closed. Parents, if your children aren't feeling well – keep them at home, stay in touch with your pediatrician. Good common sense will go a long way.

I commend school boards across this state as most of you kept your schools open last year and are committed to doing so again this year.

It's frustrating that we're headed into another school year with these challenges - it's disheartening that the COVID challenge continues - but I'm proud of Tennesseans who, in spite of suffering, have persevered, and because of their character, there's great hope. Thank you for joining today.

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