

Gov. Phil Scott decries politicization of wearing face masks

By Bob Audette, Brattleboro Reformer

Published: Oct 6, 2020

MONTPELIER — During his Tuesday morning COVID-19 news conference, Gov. Phil Scott was again critical of President Donald Trump.

“I continue to be concerned about the president’s lack of leadership,” said Scott, “particularly in this area of mask wearing, which has been scientifically proven to prevent the spread of the virus.”

Scott said one of the main reasons Vermont continues to lead the country in preventing the spread is that Vermonters have been sticking to the health guidelines, which include wearing masks and maintaining physical distance from people not in their immediate circles.

“Until there is a vaccine that is safe to distribute, it’s really the only thing we have to fight this,” Scott said. “I am concerned about this political division due to the mask policy and how dangerous it is. Wearing a mask is altruistic and something I believe is necessary to prevent spread.”

Tuesday was declared Vermont Mask Day, and Scott thanked [Masks4Missions.org](https://masks4missions.org), a group that was started by young Vermonters with a goal of distributing more than 30,000 masks statewide and encouraging Vermonters to #MaskUp. Scott thanked founder 18-year-old Doug Altshuler, a recent graduate of Groton School in Massachusetts and a resident of Shelburne, for his work in distributing masks and raising awareness about wearing masks.

“He’s one example among many of how Vermonters are helping each other during this pandemic,” said Scott. “Another example is the Rossi Family Foundation, which helped us secure KN-95 masks when we were in need early in the pandemic and has continued helping the region secure and distribute masks.”

Scott also held up the example of Donna Carpenter of Burton Snowboards and Trevor Braun and the team at Concept2, Inc. as two examples of individuals, nonprofits and businesses that stepped up to help the state with supplies and community outreach.

“The best way we can all show our appreciation is to stay vigilant, which will keep our case counts down,” said Scott. “Our [latest data](#) is a reminder that we’re not out of the woods yet. As cases continue to rise throughout the region, it’s critical that Vermonters and our businesses follow Vermont Department of Health guidance — wear masks, keep our distance, avoid crowds, wash our hands and stay home and away from others when sick. If we take these simple steps, we will continue to avoid the increases other states are seeing. It’s literally in our hands.”

Michael S. Pieciak, the commissioner of the Vermont Department of Financial Regulation, has been in charge of modeling the spread of COVID-19 in Vermont. He said regional increases in the spread of the virus have reduced the number of people — 2.9 million people — who can travel to Vermont without quarantining. He cautioned people in Southern Vermont about [travel](#) to Franklin County in Massachusetts and Rensselaer County in New York, which have seen an increase in infections.

Pieciak said the country as a whole has seen a 6 percent increase in infections compared to two weeks ago, averaging 40,000 to 45,000 positive cases a day.

The Northeast has seen a 48 percent increase over last week, much of that due to outbreaks in New York City. Vermont had 132 positives in September, with no fatalities and no one being admitted to an intensive care unit as a result of COVID-19.

Even with 72 new cases this week, 27 of them due to an outbreak among apple pickers at Champlain Orchards in Shoreham, “We still have the lowest seven-day infection rate in the country,” said Pieciak.

(continued)

“There is no known risk to the public,” Mark Levine, the commissioner of the Vermont Department of Health, said of the apple pickers. He also noted that it is still safe for people to pick their own apples. “There is no evidence that transmission can occur by eating food.”

Pieciak also noted that since schools reopened in the state, there has been a 41 percent reduction in cases in infants to those 19 years old, which means the school reopening plan appears to be working well. Since reopening, only four cases of COVID have been identified at the schools, compared with 85 in New Hampshire and 45 in Maine. In higher education, nearly 100,000 tests have been done since the beginning of September, with 51 students testing positive.

However, said Levine, [a recent advisory](#) posted to the website of the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention reaffirmed the spread of the virus via large droplets sometimes in the air for minutes or hours, even after the infected person has left the vicinity. He said even with 6-foot spacing, singing or exercising in poorly ventilated areas can expose a person to infectious droplets.

In other health news, state officials said Vermonters are also on track to meet or exceed the goal of 325,000 residents getting the flu vaccine.

It’s important to get the shot, said Pieciak, to keep low the numbers of people getting the flu and ending up in the hospital in case those services are needed for a serious COVID outbreak.