

Rhode Island in a “Tough Spot”: A summary of the governor’s October 15 press conference



Governor Gina Raimondo and DOH director Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott gave an emergency COVID-19 presser today at 1pm.

There were big upticks in today’s COVID data; DOH reports 228 new cases since yesterday. There are 129 people hospitalized for reasons related to COVID-19. Of those, 12 are in the intensive care unit and five are on ventilators. The percent positive rate for cases yesterday is 1.9%, but overall according to state leaders metrics are trending slowly up. The state saw two additional deaths since yesterday; both were in their 90s. This brings the Ocean State’s total fatalities from the coronavirus to 1,149.

Governor Raimondo and other state leaders promised new restrictions at yesterday’s press conference. Rhode Island COVID cases have been creeping up slowly over the autumn. Today the governor only announced one major change to restrictions, ordering common areas and workplace break rooms closed for 90 days. Raimondo said she was not lowering the social gathering limit, that it will remain at 15. According to state officials, analyzing the data and contact tracing shows most COVID spread is happening in groups well under the allowed limit.

"We're in a tough spot right now," the governor said. "We're not where we wanna be." While no new big restrictions are on the horizon, the state is committed to enforcing restrictions on the books. Crucially, new mask-wearing regulations will be forthcoming, as the state expects Rhode Islanders to wear masks when in the presence of someone they do not live with. Governor Raimondo reminded Rhode Islanders big parties or other gatherings could incur fines of \$500 per person. Rhode Island State Police have announced they are tripling enforcement presence for Halloween in a few weeks. Raimondo also asked college residents, teenagers and young students not to go out and party for Halloween. Department of Business Regulation will be stepping up enforcement of fines on businesses that violate COVID regulations.

Additionally the governor asked people to follow some of the COVID restrictions for trick-or-treating this year. Some of the guidance includes individually bagging candy to give away and finishing trick-or-treating before dark, among others. "It's not forever, this is for now," said Raimondo. While it's fun to make jabs at the governor for implying the virus is afraid of the dark, trick-or-treating during daylight hours is to limit the time (and possible exposure) of community spread. Dr. Alexander-Scott noted it was possible for a sick person to transmit COVID-19 by passing out candy, and said parents should feel welcome to wipe down candy.

The governor also asked people to keep Thanksgiving local, advising them not to travel on a plane or train. More official guidance and restrictions will be made available next week, but Raimondo added that there would be no official prohibition on Thanksgiving. The governor also said the reason for some of these restrictions and guidance was to avoid having to shut down the economy again.

Governor Raimondo also wants to step up asymptomatic testing again, using it to surveil community prevalence of COVID-19. If you are a close contact worker, a legal adult younger than 40, travel to or from other states, or recently attended a large protest or demonstration, the governor advises you to get tested.