

COVID19 POLICING PROJECT

COVID-19 enforcement on school campuses

Just 1-2 weeks into the fall semester, many universities are starting to see a sharp rise in the number of COVID-19 cases—and this appears to be the case even among schools that have sharply restricted in-person instruction and pivoted to mostly virtual learning, with some students remaining in apartments and houses near the campus community. Just one week after classes resumed, the [University of Alabama reported more than 560 new coronavirus cases](#). New positive cases have been reported from the [University of Southern California](#) to the [University of Iowa](#), and some schools, such as the University of Notre Dame and University of North Carolina, abruptly reversed plans for in-person classes due to a surge in COVID-19 numbers.

As universities are rushing to handle infection outbreaks, some college officials are responding by adding compliance with new COVID-19 policies to their school's student code of conduct. At a number of universities, failure to adhere to the school's COVID-19 rules can now result in [suspension](#) for an entire term, or the full academic year. Already we are seeing stories of students being suspended at [Syracuse University](#), [Virginia Tech](#), [Radford University](#), [St. Olaf College](#), [Marist College](#), and a number of [colleges in Indiana](#); [Montclair State University](#) and [University of Connecticut](#) revoked campus housing for a number of students; [Northeastern University is threatening students with expulsion or the loss of campus housing](#), and has [warned over a hundred incoming freshmen they could have their admission rescinded](#) if they do not formally agree to comply with the school's code of conduct. [The Ohio State University temporarily suspended 228 students](#) even before in-person classes started earlier this week.

We are similarly seeing punitive measures put into place for K-12 students who are returning back to school. Notably, the [Utah governor recently confirmed](#) that K-12 students and staff who fail to comply with the state's mask mandate can be charged with a misdemeanor. We've clearly also seen instances where students alarmed about their school's re-opening social distancing measures have been punished for drawing attention, such as the suspension (subsequently lifted) of a [15-year-old girl in Georgia whose photo of crowded campus hallways went viral](#).

The fact remains that criminalization and punitive measures are never the answer to keeping our communities safe. Such measures are acutely focused on individual behaviors, but ignore larger questions of mutual accountability and an institution's inherent responsibility to students and staff, given the context that many schools have chosen to proceed with in-person instruction in the first place.

The [push to re-open universities](#) cannot be disentangled from these institutions wanting to recoup lost revenue due to the pandemic. In prioritizing revenue over people's safety, schools are bringing students, faculty, and staff back to the campus community in the midst of an unprecedented public health crisis, and then attempting to shift any responsibility around COVID-19 infection onto the shoulders of individual student behavior. Schools are placing the onus on students, expecting children, teenagers, and young adults to comply with orders or face punitive consequences; such a framework allows school officials to blame, scold, and fault students for rising infection rates and any failings of a re-opening plan, while thus retaining tuition and housing fees.

What if schools prioritized the safety and health of students, faculty, and staff, instead of revenue? What if, instead of focusing our ire on shaming and punishing students for participating in social gatherings, we directed our attention instead to finding ways to be together safely and re-examining the accelerated, irresponsible re-opening of schools and the economy without protections for all those who are immediately placed at risk?

Tracking COVID-19 orders and enforcement

We are continuing to track COVID-19 related public health orders as they shift, as well as the enforcement of these orders:

- Check [covid19policing.com](https://www.covid19policing.com) for current orders, travel restrictions, and quarantine requirements, especially if you plan to travel out-of-state. You can also check the enforcement tracker on the page to see how orders are being enforced.
- Please continue to report any instances of police warnings, stops, arrests, fines, tickets, etc. related to COVID-19 orders or quarantine enforcement to our secure database, as well as any police-related increased exposure to COVID-19. You can either use our [reporting form](#) or email us directly at covid19policing@gmail.com.

ATTENTION!

Have you been harassed, ticketed, fined, arrested or stopped by police in connection with COVID-19 public health orders?

LET US KNOW!

Have you experienced any police-related increased exposure to COVID-19 during protests?

We're tracking information to help protect, inform, and organize against expanded policing under the pandemic

* Your personal info will be kept private. We will never share it with law enforcement or contact you without your consent.

Report* it to our secure database at www.covid19policing.com

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Increasing mask enforcement

As infection rates keep rising, more places including Southern cities have started to increase enforcement of mask-wearing over the past few weeks, including issuing fines, warnings, or citations. We anticipate that this trend will continue as cities struggle to control infection rates.

- In [our last update](#), we noted that after announcing stricter mask enforcement, [Nashville police issued 54 citations and a number of arrests](#) over the course of a weekend. Just one week later, [police issued 1,000 warnings, 9 citations, and one arrest](#) on a single Friday night; [over 1,900 warnings and 16 citations](#) on Saturday night; and a number of [arrests](#)—all for violating the mask requirement.
- In Miami Beach, [city employees and police have issued \\$14,400 in fines since July 23](#), the first day they began ticketing people for violating the city mask order. Most people have not paid. According to a city spokeswoman, violators have 30 days to pay the fines, and failure to do so could “potentially subject the violator to an additional fine of up to \$500 and a criminal misdemeanor charge of violating an executive order, which can carry up to 60 days in jail.
- In Tuscaloosa, Alabama, [police issued 12 citations for mask violations](#) after social media posts showed crowds of people at a bar. These were the first enforcement measures issued since a mask mandate as required by state emergency guidelines went into effect.
- Charleston city leaders recently voted to [stop giving warnings for those who don't comply with the city's mask ordinance](#); instead, first-time offenders will be issued a ticket and \$100 fine, followed by a \$200 fine for a second offense, and \$500 fine for each violation after that.

Travel restrictions and quarantine violations

We are continuing to see more severe enforcement of quarantine requirements, travel restrictions, and other COVID-19 related public health orders, as states and cities scramble to deal with growing infection rates.

- Hawaii's most populous island, Oahu, just announced a [mandatory two week, island-wide stay-at-home order](#) beginning on August 27, five months after there was a state-wide stay-at-home order. During the shutdown, government officials plan to [ramp up testing](#). [Violations are punishable as a misdemeanor](#), with fines of up to \$5,000, up to a year in jail, or both.
- Law enforcement in [Hawaii has continued strict enforcement](#) and has cited, charged, and arrested people in violation of a range of public health orders. Police have arrested multiple people for violating the state's [mandatory 14-day quarantine](#), including [three individuals](#), [two women from Chicago](#), [two locals and a couple](#), a [woman from](#)

[Washington state](#), and a local [high school teacher](#). Since [launching](#) a “COVID enforcement team” and a COVID-19 hotline three weeks ago, Honolulu police have reported getting an [average of 140-150 calls daily of order violations](#), including quarantine violations, and they continue to issue hundreds of citations.

- [Connecticut recently issued its first fines for violating the state’s COVID-19 travel restrictions](#), which require anyone traveling to Connecticut from the state’s designated list of hotspots to fill out a health questionnaire and quarantine for 14 days. Each of the seven travelers was fined \$1,000 for failing to complete the travel advisory form. [One of the first travelers to be cited was also fined an additional \\$1,000 for refusing to self-quarantine](#) for 14 days.
- [New York announced a plan to issue a \\$2,000 fine](#) to travelers arriving from the list of states on the travel advisory who leave the airport without submitting a contact form detailing all their travel information. Failure to do so before leaving the airport will receive a summons and a \$2,000 fine, and be brought to hearing in order to complete the mandatory quarantine. [Celebrities and performers arriving in New York for the Video Music Awards](#) have been exempted by the state Department of Health.
- Since setting up random [checkpoints at major bridges and tunnels](#) into New York City a few weeks ago to help enforce the state’s mandatory two-week quarantine for travelers coming from certain states, [law enforcement has stopped over 3,000 vehicles](#) and issued two tickets and accompanying fines to drivers. The mayor has announced [more checkpoints](#) set up around the city in the coming weeks.

Protest policing and masks

As people continue to rise up across the country against the pandemic of state and police violence against Black people, police are defiantly continuing to engage in protest suppression tactics that not only enact direct violence against protesters, but also [place protesters at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 and injury](#). In multiple cities, protesters demanding justice for Jacob Blake were met with tear gas, smoke bombs, and flash-bag grenades. We’ve continued to see this in protests across the country, from Portland to Charlotte to Minneapolis. Using such chemical weapons, which cause physical secretions that elevate transmission risk, in the midst of a respiratory pandemic is literal viral police violence.

Increasing people’s risk of exposure to COVID-19 is a form of police violence

That includes when police:

- ▲ do not wear masks, despite often having significantly higher infection rates than the general population
- ▲ violently & in close contact, attack protesters
- ▲ corral & kettle protesters into small spaces
- ▲ deploy chemical agents that attack the eyes & lungs
- ▲ detain people in large groups, holding them in buses & cells



Such policing tactics, including instigating physical violence against protesters, kettling protesters, corralling protesters into small spaces, arresting and detaining them in vehicles and jails, where physical distancing is impossible and are often sites of higher rates of infection, is yet another way that police increase harm to protesters and seek to deter future protests—as we’ve noted many times previously:

**INCREASING PEOPLE’S RISK OF EXPOSURE
TO COVID-19 IS A NEW, INSIDIOUS FORM
OF POLICE VIOLENCE IN THE YEAR 2020.**

Adding insult to injury, many members of law enforcement still refuse to wear masks, placing anyone they come into contact with at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19. Six full months into this pandemic, we all know that widespread mask-wearing is essential to protecting ourselves and each other and to slowing down the spread of COVID-19. Yet many police officers—who are often de facto tasked with enforcing COVID-19 public health orders, and who, in many cities, often have significantly higher rates of infection compared to the general population—still do not wear masks, oftentimes in direct violation of city or state mask mandates.

- Images from recent protests, including in Kenosha, continue to show police officers dressed in riot gear, without masks.
- Recently, [Bloomington, Indiana, police defended their decision not to require masks on the job](#), despite state and local mask mandates.
- Images of [NYPD police officers without masks](#) frequently circulate on social media and are [captured in media](#) images. In response, a group formed [NYPD Mask Watch](#) to track officers who are not wearing masks. Similarly, [LAPD Unmasked](#) formed to track and share evidence of [LAPD officers without masks](#).
- A sheriff in central Florida ordered deputies and staff [not to wear face masks](#).



The pandemic of policing continues to enact violence against Black and Brown communities already bearing the brunt of the co-pandemics of state violence and COVID-19. Wearing a mask is the literal least thing police officers could do—and yet, many simply refuse.

If you experience or see instances of police increasing someone's risk of exposure of COVID-19 infection through protest policing tactics, failure to wear a mask, etc., please [add it to our secure database using our reporting form](#), and encourage others to do the same online and using our [print-out cards](#).

Court appearances during a pandemic

Six months into the COVID-19 public health crisis, something we are keen to keep an eye on are cases where people failing to appear in court—in the midst of a global pandemic that is upending people's livelihoods, economic security, housing, food stability, etc. across the country—are being arrested and charged. In [West Virginia](#), a special multi-agency task force set up to arrest people who failed to make their court appearance for felony arrests during the pandemic, arrested 15 people. In [Philadelphia](#), a judge ordered the arrest of an 88-year-old woman who failed to appear in court due to coronavirus symptoms.

Data breaches and privacy

We've previously touched on how [data collection and sharing is a major site of expansion for state surveillance](#), coupled with policing, under this ongoing public health crisis. In an alarming development, it was announced earlier this week that the [FBI is investigating a data breach from June 19th that may have shared the identity of people with the COVID-19 virus in South Dakota](#). The state used Houston-based company Netsential to build their online portal earlier this spring.

As activists have warned, we must remain vigilant about the sharing of such information and the potential that the expansion of surveillance and other measures taken during the pandemic could be misused by state and federal agencies and law enforcement to further surveil and harm Black, Brown, Indigenous, immigrant and migrant communities.

Coronavirus emergency federal dollars and police equipment

As part of the CARES legislation, the U.S. Department of Justice has been dispensing over \$800 million in federal Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program (CESFP) grants to local state public safety agencies for equipment and personal protection items during the COVID-19 pandemic. From [Kentucky](#) to [Massachusetts](#), funds are being used to purchase, among other things, PPE, cleaning supplies, medical equipment, disinfectant supplies, and overtime expenses. In [Hamden, Connecticut, the police department said it would use over a third of their awarded federal grant money to buy a \\$33,000 drone](#). In order to meet the grant requirements, they stated that the drone could be equipped with a public address system to “communicate with our homeless population” about resources.