

*The 1889 Institute, an Oklahoma think tank, has released the following statement regarding the Governor's recent announcement lifting state-level Covid-19-related restrictions and mandates and continued local restrictions.*

Oklahoma has moved into phase three of its vaccination schedule, meaning educators and critical infrastructure personnel are eligible to receive the vaccine. In addition, anyone eligible from one of the first two phases, including first responders, anyone over 65 and any adult who has a comorbidity, can still get the vaccine. The survival rate for people who are not yet eligible for the vaccine and contract SARS-CoV-2 is greater than ninety-nine percent.

Governor Stitt withdrew the final remaining statewide restrictions last week. It is time for municipalities to follow suit. Any local restrictions relating to social distancing or mandating personal protection equipment such as masks should be immediately repealed. Additionally, all public schools should immediately transition to in-person instruction five days per week.

Lockdowns and other restrictions have cost too much, and a recent CDC report shows their benefits were small. The data showed less than a 1.5 percent decrease in the rates of growth for both infections and deaths after mask mandates were implemented. These restrictions have cost more than jobs and income; depression is on the rise, domestic violence is up, and suicides have spiked. Student learning has suffered greatly. Students were robbed of nearly one quarter year of school in spring of 2020, and have in many instances seen instruction time plummet for the 2020-21 school year.

Now that the most vulnerable among us have access to vaccines and N-95 masks, should they choose to wear them, it is time to allow a return to normal. Lifting distancing and mask mandates does not prevent anyone from wearing a mask. It does not prevent businesses from implementing distancing and mask requirements for their customers. It merely allows a return to normalcy for those who have suffered through twelve months of unprecedented disruption.