

Cooper extends current COVID-19 orders

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TRIAD — The current set of relaxed COVID-19 emergency orders will remain in place at least through the end of

next month, Gov. Roy Cooper announced Friday afternoon.

In mid-May, the governor rolled back key coronavirus pandemic restrictions that had been in place since

March 2020. The rollback included dropping most mask requirements, eliminating social distancing limits and lifting COVID-19 rules on businesses.

The emergency order that relaxed the pandemic restrictions was set to expire at 5 p.m. Friday. Cooper extended the state of emergency until July 30.

“We are seeing tremendous improvement with fewer cases, hospitalizations, deaths and safety restrictions, but

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this is no time to hang up a 'Mission Accomplished' banner in our fight against the pandemic," Cooper said in a prepared statement. "We are laser focused on getting more shots in arms, boosting our economy and protecting unvaccinated people from the virus and this executive order is essential for those efforts."

Cooper announced his decision in a news release instead of the familiar briefing with state Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mandy Cohen at the State Emergency Operations Center in Raleigh that has become a fixture during the pandemic.

The extended emergency orders continue requirements for masks in certain settings, such as public transportation, schools, health care settings and child care facilities.

Some critics and observers have argued that Cooper should lift all emergency orders because of the progress with vacci-

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nations and the declining number of COVID-19 deaths. But the governor maintains public health safety protocols remain necessary.

In his latest proclamation, Cooper states that "despite the recent improving trends, COVID-19 is a deadly and dangerous disease."

Still, the governor expressed optimism about the pace of improvement and said his office would continue monitoring to see if more changes can be implemented.

In the statement Friday, the governor's office said it plans "to continue lifting restrictions as more people are vaccinated and the state winds down pandemic response efforts."

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