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Highly Vaccinated Puerto Rico Orders Restaurant, Education and Health Employees to Get Booster Shot; Cruise Ships Cancel Calls Following Stringent Requirements

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Ernice Gilbert **January 07, 2022**

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Aerial shot of San Juan Puerto Rico cityscape and coastal view. By. GETTY IMAGES

USVI neighbor Puerto Rico has been experiencing a wave of Covid-19 infections driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant, compelling the U.S. territory's governor to take restrictive measures in an attempt to mitigate spread.

The island commonwealth of 3.3 million people has reported more than 200,000 confirmed cases and over 3,300 deaths, and as of Wednesday Puerto Rico had a positivity rate of 36 percent — the

highest level for the island since the pandemic began in March 2020. The surge in cases, which has overwhelmed medical staff, also led to a temporary shortage of testing kits.

According to [the P.R. Dept. of Health](#), 80.7 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated, while 90.4 percent of has received at least one dose.

Governor Pedro Pierluisi on Tuesday acted drastically, ordering restaurant employees, along with those who work in the medical field and education to get their booster shot by January 15. Businesses selling food and drinks have been ordered to reduce capacity 50 percent and 75 percent indoors and outdoors respectively. And recent orders also demand that customers show proof of vaccination or a negative Covid-19 test to enter any facility selling food and drinks.

Meanwhile, people coming into Puerto Rico, whether from the U.S. mainland or elsewhere, and whether vaccinated or unvaccinated, must show proof of a negative Covid-19 test taken within 48 hours. The order for travel, announced in December, demands that persons who arrive without a test take one within 48 hours or face heavy fines. Persons who are not vaccinated will face a mandatory 7-day quarantine period, according to the December order.

A recent order has also affected the cruise industry, leading to a flurry of call cancellations. The order demands that all cruise ship passengers who disembark in Puerto Rico must be fully vaccinated and show proof of a negative Covid-19 test taken 48 hours ahead of the ship's arrival to the island.

The government has postponed the reopening of in-person learning until January 24, and has asked private schools to do the same. In Puerto Rico, 97 percent of educators are fully vaccinated, 40 percent of whom have taken a booster shot, and over 40 percent of children ages 5-11 have been vaccinated, according to data provided by the P.R. Dept. of Health.