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# Erie County, Pegula Sports Entertainment announce vaccine mandate

Policy affects fans attending Bills, Sabres games; online group circulates petition in protest

**BY TERRY DUFFY**  
Editor-in-Chief

It was only a matter of time. Earlier this week, the Erie County Health Department and Pegula Sports Entertainment – owner of the Buffalo Bills and Buffalo Sabres – announced new COVID-19 vaccine mandates would be in effect for fans attending football games at Highmark Stadium and hockey games at KeyBank Center. All fans will be required to show proof of vaccination – no test-out option will be available.

This follows the Bills home opener last Sunday – a game that drew more than 71,000. ECDOH officials later heard criticisms over the number of fans not abiding by an earlier-implemented masking policy.

The Buffalo Bills stated, “In compliance with the Erie County Health Department’s directive, the Buffalo Bills and Highmark Stadium announced ... that all guests age 12 and over will be required to provide proof of COVID-19 vaccination to attend Bills home games.

“For the games on September 26 and October 3, fans will be permitted to enter with one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Beginning with the October 31 game guests must be fully vaccinated for entry. Guests are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their second dose in a two-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or two weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson and Johnson’s vaccine.”

Guests under age 12 will not be required to have a vaccination, but will be required to wear a mask at all times while inside Highmark Stadium. Guests ages 12 and older will no longer need to wear masks due to the vaccination requirements. Fans from outside of the area must present their state’s individual vaccine verification when attending a game.

Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz said, “A physical vaccine/vaccination card (will be accepted). Photocopies will not be accepted; it must be the actual card. Or the New York state Excelsior Pass or a clear digital vaccine card.

“Guests cannot provide a photograph of the card; they must have the card or one of the three other methods, which are electronics



Fans at a sold-out Highmark Stadium welcome the Buffalo Bills last Sunday. (Photo by Terry Duffy)

apps that are basically verified previously.”

Poloncarz added, “We believe that the only safe way to ensure a real safe atmosphere is to actually have people vaccinated.”

“We’ve worked collaboratively with the county over the past several weeks, months, all throughout the pandemic,” said Ron Racula, executive vice president of Pegula Sports and Entertainment. “We are looking to provide the safest environment for our fans that we possibly can. We feel this the right move going forward.”

The policy takes effect for the Bills home game Sept. 26 vs. the Washington Football Team.

With this announcement, the Bills join the NFL’s Seattle Seahawks, New Orleans Saints and Las Vegas Raiders in employing a vaccination mandate for fans attending home games.

The team indicated it would issue individual game or even season ticket refunds to fans who choose to opt of the new policy. However, those fans who choose to do so also face the risk of losing their season ticket seniority status with the team.

As expected, the new vaccine announcement is rattling fans.

In response, an online group called “Concerned Bills Fans” is circulating an online petition to protest the measure it’s calling “Poloncarz Stadium Segregation.”

“This petition is being circulated to demand Erie County

Executive Mark Poloncarz stop his aggressive move to steal Bills football season tickets from lifelong fans and to stop other fans from attending home games at ‘Poloncarz Stadium’ under the guise of public health,” a group post stated. “If his segregation efforts succeed, Poloncarz Stadium will only allow vaccinated fans to attend Buffalo Bills home games. Fans who had the virus in the past, people with even stronger natural immunities, will not be able to attend. Nobody without a vaccine at all.

“There are many other Covid countermeasures which could have mitigated possible viral spread at Poloncarz Stadium. Random testing; required recent test results. Poloncarz Stadium could have provided low-cost antibodies test to assure previously infected fans are respected. ...

“Many of these tactics would have been acceptable to lifelong loyal Buffalo Bills football fans. But Mark Poloncarz could not be bothered with fairness, he went right to segregation. Now that Governor Cuomo is gone, Poloncarz wants to step in and replace him to dictate the lives of Western New Yorkers and loyal sports team fans.”

The “Concerned Bills Fans” petition can be found online at <https://www.petitions.net/stop-poloncarz?fbclid=IwAR0N53F8Q0lpXFFwIwO26AcOES8Kw7hCdD3X9w27tqWqXGf94A-AVb077E>.

## BIG WEEKEND IN LEWISTON

•On Friday and Saturday, playground equipment will begin to be installed for the **inclusive playground behind Marilyn Toohy Park** at the Red Brick Municipal Building. For more information on the community build, or to volunteer, call the village office at 754-8271.

•Lower Niagara Community Survivors present **“RockOut Cancer.”** A preparty begins about 7 p.m. Friday at the Stone House on Center Street. Summer of ‘69 will perform. Tickets are \$10 at the door. “ROC” then

runs from noon to 8 p.m. Sunday at the same location. Food will be provided by a bevy of top local eateries, including the Brickyard, Casa Antica, Gallo, Just Desserts by Aimee and The Village Bake Shoppe. Bands slated to perform include Mr. Thank You, Busted in Eden, Vinyl Addiction, The Tower and Reflector. Tickets are \$25 presale or \$30 at the door. The Stone House is located at 755 Center St.

•“Lewiston Jeopardy” will take place at the newly restored Brickyard Brewing Company at

6:30 p.m. Saturday. The event is a fundraiser for the Historical Association of Lewiston. The actual contest is modeled after the “Jeopardy” game show on television, and clues will be about Lewiston and Western New York – including history, local culture, and general regional knowledge. Reservations can be purchased for a \$35 donation. Call 754-4214 to charge a donation over the phone. Beer and pizza are included. The BBC is located at 406 Center St.