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WKU kicks off graduation season this weekend

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Joseph Ayers of Bowling Green hugs his mother, math instructor Robin Ayers, and his friend Daniel Ruanto of Bowling Green as they finish the Topper Walk on Friday, May 11, 2018, at WKU's new commencement ceremony. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Austin Anthony

Kicking off a graduation season like no other, Western Kentucky University will recognize nearly 4,200 students who graduated during the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters with commencement ceremonies Saturday at Houchens-Smith Stadium.

WKU will award degrees during two commencement ceremonies this weekend, with the first one at 10 a.m. dedicated to graduates of the Gordon Ford College of Business and the College of Health and Human Services. Later, a

ceremony for graduates from the Potter College of Arts and Letters, the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences and Ogden College of Science and Engineering will be at 6 p.m.

Whale Won't Leave Her Alone

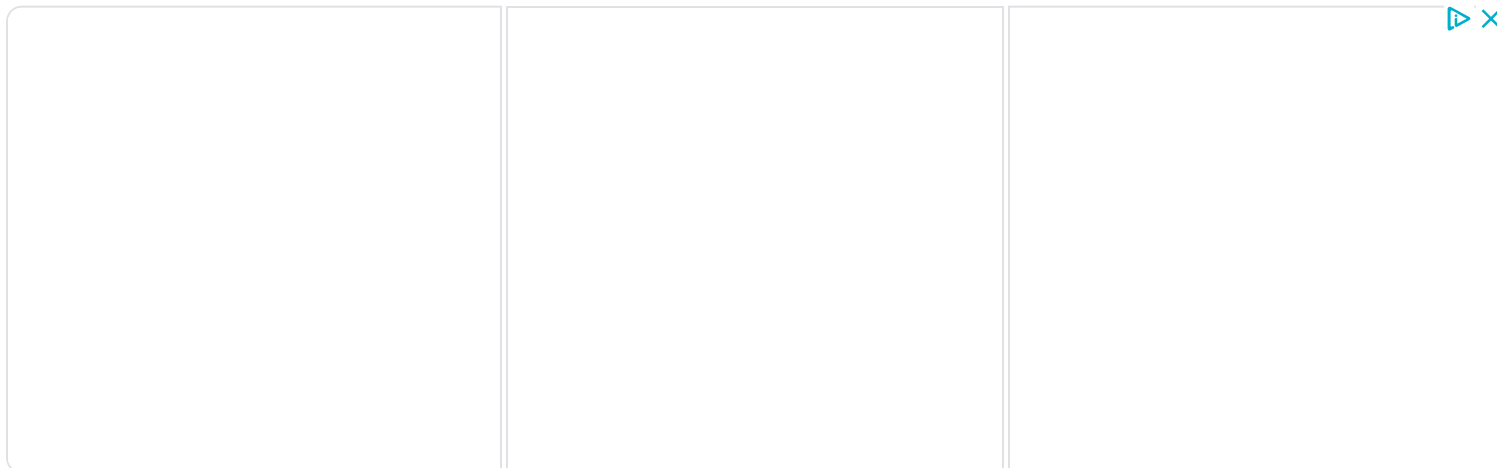
Whale Starts To Ram Diver, She Looks Down and Realizes Why

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The Topper Walk will begin 45 minutes before each graduation ceremony, with graduates assembling along WKU's Avenue of Champions about an hour beforehand.

On May 8, WKU will hold a commencement celebration for spring and summer 2020 graduates of all five academic colleges at 10 a.m. at Houchens-Smith Stadium. Before the ceremony, graduates will gather at 9 a.m. along the Avenue of Champions in front of the Downing Student Union for the Topper Walk.

This weekend, WKU will confer degrees and certificates to 4,180 graduates from fall 2020, spring 2021 and summer 2021 semesters, specifically, 139 associate, 2,836 bachelor's, 725 master's, 85 doctoral and six specialist degrees and 271 undergraduate certificates and 118 graduate certificates.



Just the thing you wanted

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The ceremonies come as Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are loosening mask mandates.

Beshear announced that beginning April 27, the statewide mask mandate will no longer apply when Kentuckians are outside at events or venues with 1,000 people or fewer.

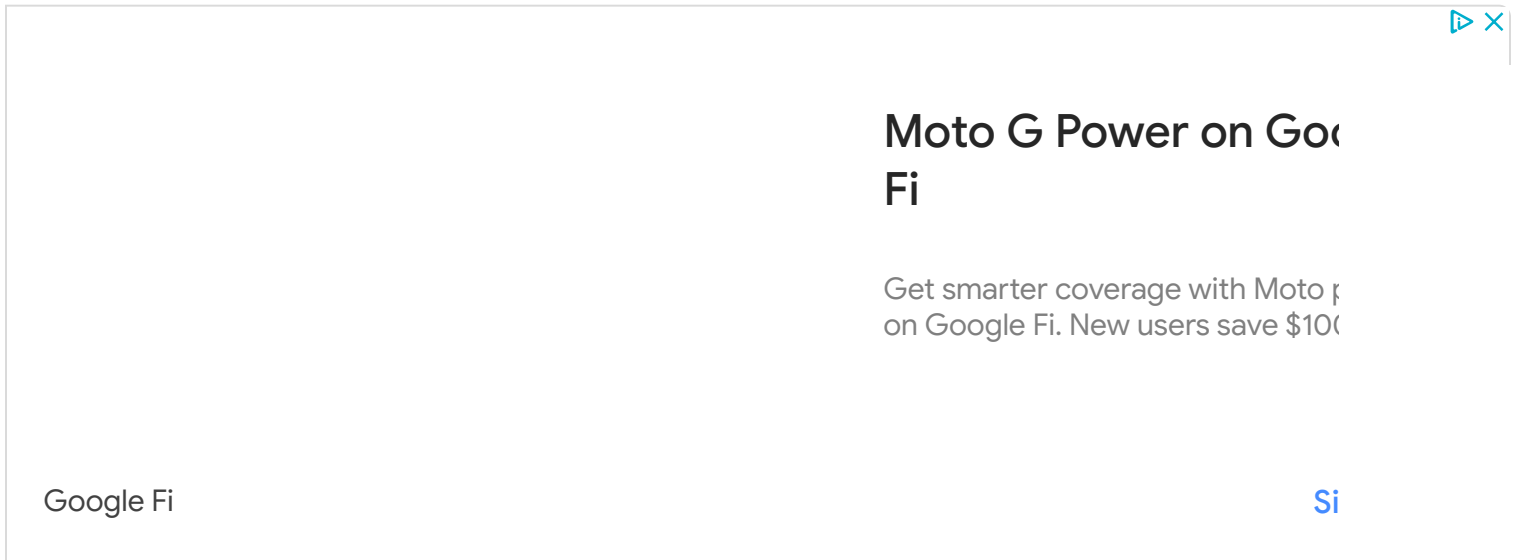
Masks are still recommended at outdoor events with 1,000 people or fewer, and the mask mandate is still in effect when Kentuckians are indoors or at any outdoor event with more than 1,000 people, according to a news release from the governor's office.

On Tuesday, U.S. health officials said fully vaccinated Americans don't need to wear masks outdoors unless they are in a big crowd of strangers, and those who are unvaccinated can go without a face covering outside in some cases, too.

The CDC guidance does differ in some areas for people who are fully vaccinated and those who are not. Unvaccinated people – which the CDC defines as those who have not received both doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or the

one-shot Johnson & Johnson formula – should wear masks at outdoor gatherings that include other unvaccinated people. They also should keep using masks at outdoor restaurants.

So far, 1,726,346 Kentuckians have received at least their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. As Kentucky’s vaccinated rate ticks up, more restrictions will be loosened, Beshear said.



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Of the updated guidance from his administration, Beshear said, “What this means is at events like the Kentucky Derby, you still have to wear a mask, but if you’re at a backyard barbecue, your community pool or an outdoor wedding, you’re not required to wear a mask.

“We hope this is a relief for people, and remember, the state will be able to lift even more restrictions once the 2.5 million vaccine Team Kentucky Vaccination Challenge is reached,” Beshear said.

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