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TO: All Californians

SUBJECT: Guidance for the Use of Face Masks

Related Materials: [Face Coverings Q&A](#) | [Face Coverings Fact Sheet \(PDF\)](#) | [Face Mask Tips and Resources](#) | [Face Shields Q&A \(PDF\)](#) | [Safe Schools for All Hub](#) | [More Home & Community Guidance](#) | [All Guidance](#) | [More Languages](#)

Updates as of April 20, 2022:

- In alignment with the CDC's announcement that its order requiring masking on public transportation and at transportation hubs is no longer in effect, effective immediately California's requirement for masking on public transit and in transportation hubs is terminated. CDPH strongly recommends that individuals in these settings continue to wear a mask.

Guidance For the Use of Masks

Background

California has used science to guide our health protection strategies throughout the pandemic. Data show that because of these strategies, we have saved lives. This is due in large part to the collective efforts of Californians to get vaccinated, get boosted, and wear masks indoors.

A universal indoor masking requirement was reinstated on December 15, 2021, to add a layer of mitigation as the Omicron variant, a Variant of Concern as labeled by the World Health Organization, increased in prevalence across California, the United States, and the world and spread much more easily than the original SARS-CoV-2 virus and the Delta variant. Implementing the universal masking requirement in all indoor public settings during the winter season was an important tool to decrease community transmission and protect critical healthcare system capacity during the highly infectious Omicron surge. Since the peak in case rates during the Omicron surge in early January 2022, the dramatic surge in cases and hospitalizations due to the highly infectious Omicron variant has declined significantly. Californians have also become increasingly knowledgeable about how to protect themselves and their loved ones with effective masks when there may be risk of COVID-19 exposure or transmission. Accordingly, CDPH amended this masking guidance to allow the universal indoor masking requirement to expire on February 15, 2022 as scheduled.

Effective March 1, 2022, the requirement for unvaccinated persons to mask in indoor public settings and businesses was replaced by a **strong recommendation that all persons, regardless of vaccine status**, mask in indoor public settings and businesses (examples: retail, restaurants, theaters, family entertainment centers, meetings, state and local government offices serving the public. Additionally, after March 11, 2022, the universal masking requirement for K-12 and Childcare settings terminated.

CDPH currently **strongly recommends** that individuals in these settings continue to mask in indoor settings. Masking will continue to be an important layer of protection along with the continued recommendations around vaccinations, testing and ventilation, to keep schools a safe environment, even as case rates and hospitalizations decline.

Effective immediately, the universal masking requirement on public transit and in transit hubs is terminated. CDPH currently **strongly recommends** that individuals in these settings continue to mask while on public transit and indoors in transit hubs to continue protecting our most vulnerable and those communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Such settings are often crowded with limited and inadequate ventilation.

As we've shown in our SMARTER Plan, masks, especially those that offer the best fit and filtration (e.g., N95s, KN95s, KF94s), are highly recommended, and remain a critical component of our multi-layered approach for protection against COVID-19 infection. A series of cross-sectional surveys in the U.S. suggested that a 10% increase in self-reported mask wearing tripled the likelihood of slowing community transmission.[1] Our recently published case-control study conducted in California from February 18 to December 1, 2021 demonstrated that consistently wearing a face mask or respirator in indoor public settings reduces the risk of acquiring SARS-CoV-2 infection. [2]. Masks also remain a critical component for protecting those that are most vulnerable in our communities, including the unvaccinated, the immunocompromised, or those at risk for severe disease and illness.

Vaccination continues to remain the ultimate exit strategy out of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the percentage of Californians fully vaccinated and boosted continues to increase, we continue to have areas of the state where vaccine coverage is low, putting individuals and communities at greater risk for COVID-19. As a state, we need to remain vigilant. Accordingly, CDPH is maintaining the masking requirements in specified **high-risk settings**, consistent with CDC recommendations. This allows us to continue protecting our most vulnerable populations and the workforce that delivers critical services in these settings.

Finally, CDPH is maintaining the requirement that businesses and venue operators, including K-12 school and childcare settings, must allow any individual to wear a mask if they desire to.

In workplaces, employers are subject to the Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standards (ETS) or in some workplaces the Cal/OSHA Aerosol Transmissible Diseases (ATD) Standard and should consult those regulations for additional applicable requirements.

Local health jurisdictions and entities may continue to implement additional requirements that go beyond this statewide guidance based on local circumstances.

These requirements and recommendations will continue to be updated as CDPH continues to assess conditions on an ongoing basis.

Masking Requirements

Masks are required for all individuals in the following indoor settings, regardless of vaccination status. Surgical masks or higher-level respirators (e.g., N95s, KN95s, KF94s) with good fit are highly recommended.

- Homeless shelters[3], Emergency shelters[4] and cooling and heating centers[5]

- Healthcare settings[6] (applies to all healthcare settings, including those that are not covered by the State Health Officer Order issued on July 26, 2021)*
- State and local correctional facilities and detention centers[7]
- Long Term Care Settings & Adult and Senior Care Facilities[8]

*In certain healthcare situations or settings surgical masks (or higher filtration masks) are required. See State Health Officer Order, issued on July 26, 2021, for a full list of high-risk congregate and other specifically enumerated healthcare settings where surgical masks are required for unvaccinated workers. The Order also includes recommendations for respirator use for unvaccinated workers in healthcare and long-term care facilities in situations or settings not covered by Cal/OSHA ETS or ATD.

Additionally, masks are **strongly recommended for all persons, regardless of vaccine status**, in indoor public settings and businesses (examples: retail, restaurants, theaters, family entertainment centers, meetings, state and local government offices serving the public); on public transit (examples: airplanes, ships, ferries, trains, subways, buses, taxis, and ride-shares); and in transportation hubs (examples: airport, bus terminal, marina, train station, seaport or other port, subway station, or any other area that provides transportation). Surgical masks or higher-level respirators (e.g., N95s, KN95s, KF94s) with good fit are highly recommended.

For additional information on the most effective types of masks and ensuring a well-fitted mask for adults, individuals should refer to CDPH Get the Most out of Masking and see CDPH Masking Guidance Frequently Asked Questions. For additional information on the most effective types of masks and ensuring a well-fitted mask for children, individuals should refer to CDPH Masks for Kids: Tips and Resources.

Guidance for Businesses, Venue Operators or Hosts

In settings where masks are strongly recommended, businesses, venue operators or hosts should consider:

- Providing information to all patrons, guests and attendees regarding masking recommendations for all persons, regardless of vaccine status.
- Providing information to all patrons, guests and attendees to consider better fit and filtration for masks [Surgical masks or higher-level respirators (e.g., N95s, KN95s, KF94s) with good fit are recommended over cloth masks].
- Requiring all patrons to wear masks, especially when risk in the community may be high, or if those being served are at high-risk for severe disease or illness.
- Requiring attendees who do not provide proof of vaccination to enter indoor Mega Events to continue masking during the event, especially when not actively eating or drinking.

No person can be prevented from wearing a mask as a condition of participation in an activity or entry into a business.

Exemptions to masks requirements

The following **individuals** are exempt from wearing masks at all times:

- Persons younger than two years old. Very young children must not wear a mask because of the risk of suffocation.
- Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents wearing a mask. This includes persons with a medical condition for whom wearing a mask could obstruct breathing or who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a mask without assistance.
- Persons who are hearing impaired, or communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
- Persons for whom wearing a mask would create a risk to the person related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

- [1] Rader B, White LF, Burns MR, et al. Mask-wearing and control of SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the USA: a cross-sectional study. *The Lancet Digital Health*. 2021;3(3):e148–e157.
- [2] Andrejko KL, Pry JM, Myers JF, et al. Effectiveness of Face Mask or Respirator Use in Indoor Public Settings for Prevention of SARS-CoV-2 Infection — California, February–December 2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. ePub: 4 February 2022
- [3] CDC Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
- [4] CDC's Interim Guidance for General Population Disaster Shelters During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- [5] CDC COVID-19 and Cooling Centers
- [6] CDC Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic
- [7] CDC Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities
- [8] CDC Nursing Homes and Long-Term Care Facilities

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