



TOMÁS J. ARAGÓN, M.D., Dr.P.H.
State Public Health Officer & Director

State of California—Health and Human
Services Agency
**California Department of
Public Health**



GAVIN NEWSOM
Governor

February 7, 2022

TO: All Californians

SUBJECT: Guidance for the Use of Face Masks



This guidance will take effect on February 16, 2022. For current Guidance for the Use of Face Masks, see the current guidance for face coverings .

Changes Taking Effect February 16, 2022:

- **Universal masking shall remain required in only specified settings.**
- **Only unvaccinated persons are required to mask in all Indoor Public Settings. Fully vaccinated individuals are recommended to continue indoor masking when the risk may be high.**

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](#)

Guidance For the Use of Masks

Background

COVID-19 cases and hospitalization are declining across the state. This is due in large part to the collective efforts of Californians to get vaccinated, get boosted, and wear masks.

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 during the highly infectious Omicron surge.

The current hospital census is still over capacity, but the dramatic surge in cases and hospitalizations due to the highly infectious Omicron variant over the last two months has declined significantly. Californians are also increasingly knowledgeable about how to protect themselves and their loved ones with effective masks when there may be risk of COVID-19 exposure. Accordingly, it is now appropriate for the universal indoor masking requirement to expire on February 15, 2022 as scheduled.

The COVID-19 vaccines remain effective in preventing serious disease, hospitalization, and death from the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Unvaccinated individuals are much more likely to become infected when compared to vaccinated and boosted individuals. 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.

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]

The masking requirement in California schools has allowed us to keep schools open when compared to other parts of the country. California accounts for roughly 12% of all U.S. students, but accounted for only 1% of COVID-19 related school closures during the Omicron surge. Nationally during the Delta surge in July and August 2021, jurisdictions without mask requirements in schools experienced larger increases in pediatric case rates, and school outbreaks were 3.5 times more likely in areas without school mask requirements.[3], [4].

Maintaining the masking requirements in other specified, high-risk settings continues to be consistent with CDC recommendations and allows us to protect our most vulnerable populations and the workforce that delivers critical services in these settings.

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) (PDF) Standard and should consult those regulations for additional applicable requirements.

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.

- On public transit[5] (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)
- **Indoors** in K-12 schools[6], childcare[7]
- Emergency[8] shelters and cooling and heating centers[9]
- Healthcare settings[10]
- State and local correctional facilities and detention centers[11]
- Homeless shelters[12]
- Long Term Care Settings & Adult and Senior Care Facilities[13]

Additionally, masks **are required* for unvaccinated individuals** in indoor public settings and businesses (examples: retail, restaurants, theaters, family entertainment centers, meetings, state and local government offices serving the public). Fully vaccinated individuals are recommended to continue indoor masking when the risk may

be high. Surgical masks or higher-level respirators (e.g., N95s, KN95s, KF94s) with good fit are highly recommended.

See State Health Officer Order, issued on July 26, 2021, for a full list of high-risk congregate and other healthcare settings where surgical masks are required for unvaccinated workers, and 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.

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

***Guidance for Businesses, Venue Operators or Hosts**

In settings where masks are required only for unvaccinated individuals, businesses, venue operators or hosts may choose to:

- Provide information to all patrons, guests and attendees regarding vaccination requirements and allow vaccinated individuals to self-attest that they are in compliance prior to entry.
- Implement vaccine verification to determine whether individuals are required to wear a mask.
- Require all patrons to wear masks.

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] Jehn M, McCullough JM, Dale AP, Gue M, Eller B, Cullen T, Scott SE. Association between K–12 school mask policies and school-associated COVID-19 outbreaks — Maricopa and Pima Counties, Arizona, July–August 2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. 2021; 70(39):1372–1373.

- [4] Budzyn SE, Panaggio MJ, Parks SE, Papazian M, Magid J, Eng M, Barrios LC. Pediatric COVID-19 cases in counties with and without school mask requirements — United States, July 1–September 4, 2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2021; 70(39);1377–1378.
- [5] CDC Requirement for Face Masks on Public Transportation Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs
- [6] CDC Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools
- [7] CDC COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs
- [8] CDC's Interim Guidance for General Population Disaster Shelters During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- [9] CDC COVID-19 and Cooling Centers
- [10] CDC Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic
- [11] CDC Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities
- [12] CDC Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
- [13] CDC Nursing Homes and Long-Term Care Facilities

California Department of Public Health
PO Box, 997377, MS 0500, Sacramento, CA 95899-7377
Department Website (cdph.ca.gov)

