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Bay Area Health Officers Issue Criteria for Lifting COVID-19 Indoor Masking Requirements

As decisions to vaccinate and wear face coverings indoors drive down COVID-19 case rates and hospitalizations, health officers for the nine Bay Area jurisdictions that require face coverings in most indoor public spaces today reached consensus on criteria to lift those health orders and allow organizations to set those requirements independently.

These health officers continue to work together across the Bay Area to protect public health with a consistent regional approach, and to plan for the next phase of response to COVID-19 as this wave of the pandemic ebbs.

The counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Sonoma and the City of Berkeley will lift the indoor masking requirement in public spaces not subject to state and federal masking rules when all the following occur:

- The jurisdiction reaches the moderate (yellow) [COVID-19 transmission tier](#), as defined by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), and remains there for at least three weeks; AND
- COVID-19 hospitalizations in the jurisdiction are low and stable, in the judgment of the health officer; AND
- 80% of the jurisdiction's total population is fully vaccinated with two doses of Pfizer or Moderna or one dose of Johnson & Johnson (booster doses not considered);

OR

Eight weeks have passed since a COVID-19 vaccine has been authorized for emergency use by federal and state authorities for 5- to 11-year-olds.

Most Bay Area health departments issued the masking requirements for their respective jurisdictions on August 3, following a summer surge in cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

But with regional data showing that the surge is now receding, and with the Bay Area one of the most vaccinated regions in the country, Bay Area health officers agree it is time to plan for a transition.

Lifting a local indoor mask mandate would not prevent businesses, nonprofits, churches or others with public indoor spaces from imposing their own requirements. As COVID-19 easily spreads through airborne droplets, and face coverings remain highly powerful in preventing its spread.

Each jurisdiction will rescind its order when criteria are met in that jurisdiction. The criteria were developed to assist in determining the safest time to lift the indoor masking orders, based on regional scientific and medical consensus. The criteria also provide safety for school children, ages 5-11, who need the added protection of masks in the community to keep case rates low so they can remain in school until they can be vaccinated.

“As a safety measure, along with vaccination, face coverings have been key to our success in the Bay Area in reducing transmission and protecting public health,” said Scott Morrow, MD, San Mateo County health officer. “As we look toward lifting the mandate, it’s vital for everyone who has not gotten vaccinated to consider getting vaccinated right away.”

State health guidance for the use of face coverings will remain in effect after local masking requirements are lifted, meaning that people who are not fully vaccinated for COVID-19 must continue to wear masks in businesses and indoor public spaces.

The state also requires face coverings for everyone, regardless of vaccination status, in healthcare facilities, public transit and adult and senior care facilities. California’s masking guidelines in K-12 schools would also not be affected by changes to local health orders.

A Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advisory committee is scheduled to consider an application from Pfizer-BioNTech to grant emergency use of its COVID-19 vaccine for 5- to 11-year-olds on October 26.

Visit smchealth.org/coronavirus for local information about COVID-19, including vaccination clinics, and smcgov.org for San Mateo County’s response to the pandemic.

CONTACT FOR SAN MATEO COUNTY
Preston Merchant, Communications Officer
San Mateo County Health
press@smchealth.org
(650) 867-1661

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