

Face Coverings Q&A

9/1/2021

Related Materials:

[Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings](#) | [Face Mask Tips and Resources](#)
[Face Coverings Fact Sheet \(PDF\)](#) | [Face Shields Q&A \(PDF\)](#)
[More Home & Community Guidance](#) | [All Guidance](#)

Updates as of September 1, 2021:

- To include questions on sports and recreational activities.

The risk for COVID-19 exposure and infection will remain in California until we reach community immunity with vaccinations, especially in communities heavily impacted by COVID-19. Continued use of face coverings helps prevent COVID-19 transmission among people with higher risk of infection (those who are unvaccinated or immunocompromised), those with prolonged, cumulative exposures, and individuals whose vaccination status is unknown.

California has updated its Masking Guidance, after review of current CDC recommendations.

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 Standard, and should consult those regulations for additional applicable requirements.

Questions & Answers

Why not issue a mask mandate instead?

Our updated masking guidance incorporates recent CDC guidance and recommends universal mask use for indoor public settings, regardless of vaccination status. As always, local health jurisdictions may put in place guidance more restrictive than the state based on local conditions. Vaccines remain the best protection against COVID-19, including the highly infectious Delta variant. We urge all eligible to get vaccinated, as it is the most important thing we can do to help end this pandemic.

When will this recommendation end?

We are continuously assessing and updating our guidance based on the latest science and data.

Do fully vaccinated people ever have to wear face coverings?

To achieve universal masking in indoor public settings, CDPH is now recommending that fully vaccinated people also mask in indoor public settings across California. This adds an extra precautionary measure for all to reduce the transmission of COVID-19, especially in communities currently seeing the highest transmission rates. Masks are also required of everyone in limited settings required by federal, state or local rules. There are some situations identified by the CDC where face coverings are required for everyone, regardless of vaccination status, including:

- On public transit (airplanes, ships, ferries, trains, subways, buses, taxis, and ride-shares) and in transportation hubs (airport, bus terminal, marina, train station, seaport or other port, subway station, or any other area that provides transportation).
- Indoors in K-12 schools, childcare and other youth settings.
 - Note: This may change as updated CDC K-12 schools guidance is forthcoming.
- Healthcare settings (including long-term care facilities).
- State and local correctional facilities and detention centers.
- Homeless shelters, emergency shelters and cooling centers.
- Long Term Care Settings and Adult and Senior Care Facilities

In certain settings, surgical masks are also recommended. See full CDPH Masking Guidance for more information.

If many people are vaccinated, why do we sometimes still need to wear face coverings?

The risk for COVID-19 exposure and infection will remain until we reach community immunity from vaccinations, especially in communities heavily impacted by COVID-19.

When must unvaccinated people wear masks?

In addition to the places listed above where everyone must still wear face coverings, and consistent with CDC guidance, masks are required for unvaccinated individuals in indoor public settings and businesses (for example: live performances, indoor malls, movie theaters, places of worship, indoor mega events, and indoor museums). 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.

Are children age 2 through 11 required to wear masks indoors in K-12 schools and other youth settings?

Yes, since they are currently ineligible for vaccines and are therefore "unvaccinated."

Do "indoor public settings" include local board and commission meetings?

Yes, board and commission meetings are indoor public settings, so unvaccinated individuals are required to wear masks. Like businesses, venue operators and hosts, boards and commissions 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.

- Require proof of vaccination.
- Require all patrons to wear masks.

Does anyone need to continue to wear masks outdoors?

In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors. However, per CDC recommendations, in areas of substantial to high transmission, people who are not fully vaccinated are encouraged to wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated.

Will unvaccinated children and youth be required or recommended to wear a mask during recess outdoors if they cannot maintain physical distancing?

In general, unvaccinated children and youth do not need to wear a mask outdoors, even if they cannot maintain physical distancing. However, per CDC recommendations, in areas of substantial to high transmission, people who are not fully vaccinated are encouraged to wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact (including high-risk contact sports) with other people who are not fully vaccinated.

Does this guidance apply to colleges and universities?

Yes, all unvaccinated students, staff and faculty are required to wear a mask in all indoor settings. The University of California and the California State University systems have chosen to require vaccinations for students and faculty on campus. Institutions of Higher Education may use the same options as businesses to verify that someone is vaccinated.

Should I keep my mask on in the locker room and weight room?

Yes, masks are required indoors for all unvaccinated persons. Much of sports-related transmission is known to occur off the field. Universal masking is also strongly recommended, especially in crowded indoor communal spaces where distancing cannot be maintained or athletic areas with poor ventilation. This includes weight rooms, locker rooms, team meetings, and social gatherings.

What if I must remove my mask for any reason?

Removing the mask for any reason increases risk of infection or potentially exposing other persons to COVID-19. If it is done, it should be done for brief periods of time, away from other people, and preferably outdoors if possible.

What should I do if my mask feels wet or gets saturated with sweat?

Any face mask that feels wet or becomes saturated with sweat should be changed immediately.

What if I am playing a musical instrument that cannot be done with a mask?

For the playing of musical instruments that cannot be done with a mask (e.g., wind instruments), CDPH recommends at least one of the following:

- Performing the activity outdoors;
- Using modified masks and bell coverings when playing wind and brass instruments, and maintain at least 6 feet of physical distancing;
- Performing at least weekly screening testing with either PCR testing (1:1 or pooled PCR) or antigen testing of all unvaccinated individuals participating in these indoor activities.

What if wearing a mask may cause a safety hazard?

Masks are required for unvaccinated persons while playing all indoor sports unless wearing a mask poses a choking hazard[1]. For these activities, CDPH recommends at least one of the following:

- Performing the activity outdoors;
- Performing at least weekly screening testing with either PCR testing (1:1 or pooled PCR) or antigen testing of all unvaccinated individuals participating in these indoor activities.

Do visitors in healthcare settings, correctional facilities and detention centers also need to wear a mask?

Yes, all persons (vaccinated and unvaccinated) must wear a mask when visiting a healthcare facility, a long-term care facility (like a skilled-nursing facility), a correctional facility or a detention center. See State Public Health Officer Order issued July 26, 2021 for a full list of health facilities and high-risk congregate settings where masks are required of everyone.

How does a business verify someone is vaccinated?

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

- Provide information to all customers, guests and attendees regarding vaccination requirements and allow vaccinated individuals to self-attest that they are in compliance prior to entry.
- Require proof of vaccination.
- Require all patrons to wear masks.

Businesses may deem a customer, guest or attendee to have self-attested to being vaccinated, or to have met an approved masking exemptions, if the business has prominently displayed signage prior to entry explaining the requirements for unvaccinated individuals to wear a mask and the individual enters the business premises without wearing a mask.

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

How would a business provide information to their customers about mask requirements?

A business may post a sign or placard at the entrance to their business notifying customers of the mask requirements. Additionally, businesses may post such information on their website or at point of ticket sale prior to entry or notify their members of masking requirements.

Can a business require everyone to wear a mask, even those that are already vaccinated?

Yes, businesses have the option of requiring all patrons to wear a mask while in their facility or place of business, instead of verifying the vaccination status of each patron.

Can I be prevented from wearing a mask?

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

Who is exempt from wearing a mask?

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] See American Academy of Pediatrics, Interim Guidance: Return to Sports – When Masks should be Worn

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