

# INDOOR MASK DIRECTIVE

Public Health  
Seattle & King County



## Frequently Asked Questions for Businesses

These FAQs are specific to the Local Health Officer Directive (of 5/20/21), which will remain in effect until 70% of residents age 16 and older are fully vaccinated in King County.

### 1. How does the King County Directive affect businesses?

All businesses that are open to the public, including grocery stores and other retail settings, are encouraged to continue implementing policies and practices to ensure that their customers and employees wear face coverings. Businesses are urged to continue implementing mask requirements as they did before the updated national guidance.

Please refer to [updated mask guidance](#) from the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries and the [Local Health Officer Directive](#) on wearing masks indoors.

### 2. Can employers require all employees to get the COVID-19 vaccination?

Washington state laws do not prevent employers from requiring employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine, although there may be certain exceptions for medical or religious purposes. Learn more about vaccine and employment from the [Washington State Department of Labor & Industries](#).

### 3. If an employee wants to work without a mask, can an employer ask for proof of vaccination? If so, what type of verification is acceptable?

Yes, businesses should ask their employees for proof of vaccination if they are allowing employees to work without masks.

- If fully vaccinated employees wish to work without a mask, their employer is required to verify their vaccination status (from Washington Labor & Industries).
- If the employee works in an area where members of the public routinely enter, such as in retail stores or in the reception area of an office, the current Public Health – Seattle & King County mask Directive strongly advises everyone to continue wearing a mask and socially distancing while indoors, even if they are fully vaccinated.
- If the employee works in a setting where the public does not routinely enter, the business may allow the employee to work without a mask if they have confirmed they are fully vaccinated.

Employers may choose from the following acceptable forms of vaccination documentation: CDC vaccination card, a photo of the card, documentation from a health care provider, or documentation from the state immunization information system. An employer may choose to accept a signed statement from an individual verifying that they have been vaccinated. Evidence of the verification system must be available to L&I upon request.

Everyone **must continue wearing a mask in the following settings:**

- homeless service sites, such as shelters
- healthcare settings
- corrections facilities
- schools, and childcare settings.

Learn more about [masking guidance](#) from the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries.

**4. Can an employee choose to wear a mask if the business allows employees to work without masks?**

Yes, employers must allow employees to wear a mask if the employee chooses, regardless of vaccination status.

According to Washington Labor & Industries, employers cannot fire or discriminate against an employee who is at high risk of contracting COVID-19 and is seeking accommodation that protects them from COVID-19 exposure. This includes when an employee chooses to wear a mask.

**5. Do businesses need to implement mask mandates or policies if a business or company has removed their mask mandate nationally?**

Everyone is strongly encouraged under the current King County mask Directive to continue wearing masks in all indoor public spaces, including businesses that do not have a mask mandate. People who are not vaccinated still need to wear masks, in accordance with the [State Health Order](#). It is recommended that businesses in King County maintain those policies and practices that ensure their customers and employees wear face coverings, even if nationally the organization is no longer implementing them.

**6. Do employers need to provide face coverings to employees who need them at work?**

Yes. The Department of Labor & Industries requires employers to provide at no cost appropriate face coverings or masks for employees and volunteers who don't work alone. Read more about [face covering and mask requirements](#) for employers from the Washington Department of Labor & Industries.

**7. What is the difference between public and private indoor spaces?**

Public indoor spaces are those that the public routinely enters, such as retail stores, government buildings (including office buildings and libraries), common areas in multi-unit housing, restaurants, and reception areas. Other areas where members of the public do not routinely enter, such as private office buildings, or inventory areas and back-offices in large box stores, are considered private indoor spaces. In private indoor spaces, the state Labor & Industries guidance would apply to employees (see #3).

**8. If I have a public indoor space and check vaccination status of those who enter, do fully vaccinated guests need to wear masks?**

Businesses/organizations that operate public indoor spaces may find it is most efficient to request all clients and visitors wear masks.

However, a business may choose to allow fully vaccinated clients/visitors to not wear a mask indoors and still follow the King County mask Directive if all of the following conditions are met:

- Verify the vaccination status of everyone entering the space
- Create a system or process to monitor that unvaccinated people continue to wear a mask (for example, creating vaccinated-specific sections)
- Those who are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated must wear a mask and maintain physical distancing.

Some settings where this applies include faith-based religious settings and membership-based businesses like gyms.

## 9. What do business owners need to know about fully reopening on June 30?

Governor Jay Inslee announced that Washington State will fully reopen on June 30. Until then, King County will remain in Phase 3 of the Healthy Washington Roadmap to Recovery plan. Business owners should continue implementing [Phase 3 reopening guidance](#) until June 30, or more announcements are made.

## 10. Are there any changes to social distancing and cleaning/disinfecting recommendations?

According to updated [Workplace COVID-19 Prevention](#) from the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, employees who are not fully vaccinated must stay six feet away from other coworkers and the public. Fully vaccinated employees are generally no longer required to maintain six feet of social distancing from others, **except** if required by the employer or when working in the following settings:

- Health care (including long-term care, doctor's offices, hospitals)
- Public transportation (aircraft, train, road vehicles)
- K-12 schools, childcare facilities, and day camps in locations where children and/or adolescents are present
- Correctional facilities
- Homeless service sites, including shelters

Review updated [cleaning and disinfecting guidance](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Following [indoor air quality and ventilation](#) recommendations will also reduce risk of spreading COVID-19 indoors.

## Online Resources

King County Indoor Masking Directive: [www.kingcounty.gov/masks](http://www.kingcounty.gov/masks)

Summary of COVID-19 vaccination among King County residents data dashboard:

<https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/vaccination.aspx>

Washington State Department of Labor & Industries COVID-19 Resources:

<https://www.lni.wa.gov/agency/outreach/novel-coronavirus-outbreak-covid-19-resources>

Washington State Department of Labor & Industries Mask and Distancing Requirements:

<https://www.lni.wa.gov/forms-publications/F414-179-000.pdf>