

Office of the Director

401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1300
Seattle, WA 98104-1818

206-296-4600 Fax 206-296-0166

TTY Relay: 711

www.kingcounty.gov/health

LOCAL HEALTH OFFICER INDOOR MASKING DIRECTIVE

Whereas state law, RCW 70.05.070(2) - (3), requires and empowers the Local Health Officer to take such action as is necessary to maintain health and to control and prevent the spread of any contagious or infectious diseases within the jurisdiction, and;

Whereas state regulation, WAC 246-100-036, requires the Local Health Officer, when necessary, to institute disease control measures as he, she, or they deem necessary based on his, her, or their professional judgment, current standards of practice, and the best available medical and scientific information;

Whereas SARS-CoV-2 spreads from person to person primarily through inhalation of air carrying very small droplets and aerosol particles that contain infectious virus, and;

Whereas the risk of transmission is greatest within three to six feet of an infectious source, but can also occur more than six feet away; and;

Whereas COVID-19 infections can be spread from persons who are symptom-free and before symptoms appear, and;

Whereas fully vaccinated people have a very high level of protection against COVID-19 compared to unvaccinated, with a much lower chance of getting sick or spreading it to others;

Whereas, the CDC recently issued guidance announcing that fully vaccinated individuals may safely congregate within indoor spaces with both fully vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. However, the CDC also stated that this guidance should be interpreted in the context of current local SARS-CoV-2 transmission and vaccination levels;

Whereas in King County SARS-CoV-2 transmission is increasing largely due the spread of the more contagious Delta variant, the discontinuation of the Healthy Washington Roadmap to Recovery community level COVID-19 restrictions, and a corresponding increase in activities and opportunities for SARS-CoV-2 transmission from person to person, and with higher rates of disease among young to middle aged adults and teens, in south and southeast King County, and in Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Black, and Native American/Alaska Native communities, also disproportionately affecting essential workers and multi-generational households;

Whereas the Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 infection is significantly more contagious than previous SARS-CoV-2 viruses;

Whereas currently some 75% of King County residents ages 12 years and older are fully vaccinated against COVID-19, yet approximately 700,000 King County residents remain unvaccinated, including approximately 390,000 King County residents who are eligible for vaccination and not vaccinated and

approximately 308,000 King County children less than 12 years of age who are not currently eligible for vaccination, and, tens of thousands of persons in King County have underlying immunocompromise, and all of these groups are at increased risk for COVID-19 due to the Delta variant compared with previously circulating SARS-COV-2 lineages;

Whereas in King County COVID-19 vaccine coverage rates vary by age, race, ethnicity, and geography. The COVID-19 vaccine completion rate is significantly lower in younger age groups (57% in 12-19 years old, 61% in 20-29 years old; 69% in 30-39 years old populations), and among Black (56%) and Hispanic (58%) community members and in certain neighborhoods in south and southeast King County, exacerbated by underlying social determinants of health;

Whereas the vast majority of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths occur among unvaccinated persons --vaccination affords excellent protection against serious COVID-19 infections, although a small proportion of vaccinated persons can still become infected and transmit the disease;

Whereas when COVID-19 spreads at a high rate among the unvaccinated, the risk of being exposed is higher for everyone – vaccinated and unvaccinated – and more infections will occur, primarily among unvaccinated people, and;

Whereas face masks reduce the emission of SARS-CoV-2 virus-laden droplets (“source control”) from infected persons and inhalation of these droplets by a wearer; and, community masking is recommended by CDC to reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2;

Whereas when unvaccinated people gather indoors, especially without wearing masks, they are at risk both of getting COVID-19 themselves as well as spreading it to others. The risk of exposure is especially higher in crowded indoor spaces with unvaccinated people, poor ventilation, and activities that can increase the amount of virus in the air such as singing, shouting and aerobic exercise;

Whereas in any public spaces, there is currently no practical way to know who is or is not vaccinated;

Whereas the University of Washington’s Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation’s most recent COVID-19 Results Briefing for Washington State on July 22, 2021 projects that if universal mask coverage (95%) is attained in the next week, there will be between 840 and 1,300 fewer cumulative reported deaths on November 1st in Washington state;

Based upon all the above, the Local Health Officer hereby finds that:

Continued use of face masks for everyone 5 years of age and older within indoor public spaces is reasonable and necessary in King County to reduce the risk for COVID-19 transmission until Public Health – Seattle & King County confirms that the COVID-19 risk to King County residents is substantially reduced based on one or more of the following: COVID-19 disease rates decline to low levels of community transmission as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); COVID-19 hospitalizations and death rates stabilize at low levels; a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is authorized by the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) for use in children 5 years through 11 years of age .

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY, as Local Health Officer I hereby **DIRECT as follows:**

INDOOR MASKING DIRECTIVE

Everyone 5 years of age and older in King County should continue to wear a face covering within indoor public spaces, unless a state-approved method is used to assure that all people allowed inside have been fully vaccinated.

Children age two, three, or four years old, while exempt from this official directive, are also recommended to wear a face covering with the assistance and close supervision of an adult in accordance with the current Health Order from the Secretary of the Washington Department of Health.

Everyone in correctional facilities, homeless shelters, schools, public transportation, and certain health care settings, including doctor's offices, long-term care, and hospitals must also wear a well-fitted mask and adhere to guidance from the Washington State Department of Health.

This DIRECTIVE applies to indoor spaces that are open to the public, including retail, grocery stores, government buildings, and other businesses and places where members of the public can enter freely; it does not apply to indoor non-public spaces, including businesses, offices, and other places of employment with limited access. Employers should continue to follow current guidance and requirements from the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries on worker safety.

This **DIRECTIVE** also does not apply to outdoor places. Please follow current Washington State Department of Health guidance and directives on the use of masks outdoors.

I strongly recommend and urge all people in King County to voluntarily comply with this **DIRECTIVE**, and likewise urge all businesses that are open to the public, including grocery and other retail establishments, to continue implementing policies and practices to ensure that their customers and employees wear face masks, in order to protect the health of their customers and workers.

This **DIRECTIVE** will remain in effect until Public Health – Seattle & King County confirms that COVID-19 disease rates decline to low levels of transmission as defined by the CDC or is otherwise rescinded.

Signed and ordered this 26th day of July 2021, in Seattle, Washington, by



Dr. Jeff Duchin
Local Health Officer
Public Health – Seattle & King County