



PUBLIC HEALTH INSIDER

OFFICIAL INSIGHTS FROM PUBLIC HEALTH – SEATTLE & KING COUNTY STAFF



REGION'S TOP HEALTH OFFICIALS ISSUE UNIFIED ADVICE: EVERYONE SHOULD MASK UP IN INDOOR PUBLIC SPACES

 *Public Health Insider*

Update as of August 12, 2021: Health officers from *all* 35 local health jurisdictions across Washington state have **joined together** in emphasizing the importance of masks in indoor, public spaces regardless of vaccination status.

Originally posted July 26, 2021: Top local health officials from across the Puget Sound region are joining together to send a message: **Everyone, regardless of vaccination status, should wear a mask in indoor, public spaces.** **This unified recommendation** comes as case counts in our region **are rising again**, driven largely by the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant of COVID-19.

“The health officers of Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Pierce, San Juan, and Snohomish counties have joined together to pass on their best public health advice to protect you, your family, and our communities,” says a joint statement from the region’s county health officers.

"We recommend all residents wear facial coverings when in indoor public settings where the vaccination status of those around you is unknown. This step will help reduce the risk of COVID-19 to the public, including customers and workers, help stem the increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in many parts of the state, and decrease the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant."

Getting vaccinated is still our best defense against COVID-19. But with disease levels rising, the health officers strongly recommend adding an extra layer of protection by wearing a well-made, well-fitted face mask.

We know it can be confusing and, sometimes, frustrating to have to reinstate protective measures that many had hoped they were finished with. But unfortunately, COVID-19 has not gone away, and people's lives are still at stake. We have to stay flexible as conditions change and as the impact in our communities continues to shift.

For now, our best public health advice is to get vaccinated AND wear a mask.

"The Delta variant presents a significant new threat, but we have great tools at our disposal to fight COVID-19. Most important are our vaccines, which continue to do an excellent job of what they're intended to do – prevent serious illness. But, until we're further down the road, and in a safer and more stable place, it makes sense to continue to take advantage of layering effective measures to reduce our risk. Wearing a mask in indoor public settings where not everyone is known to be vaccinated is easy, effective, provides additional protection for all, and allows us to more safely get back to doing the things we want to do and need to do."

DR. JEFF DUCHIN, HEALTH OFFICER, PUBLIC HEALTH – SEATTLE & KING COUNTY.

King County issued a new **local health officer Directive** strongly recommending masks in indoor, public spaces. Washington State already requires unvaccinated people to wear masks in indoor public settings, although in stores and other public spaces, there is no practical way to know who is vaccinated and who isn't. For this reason, universal masking in indoor public spaces provides a more reliable way to ensure everyone stays safer as we monitor the current increasing disease trends.

Masking in public spaces also benefits those who are in close contact with someone at increased risk and those with children under 12 who cannot yet get the vaccine. Masks also protect people from other respiratory illnesses or allergens.

Federal guidelines already require universal masking in certain settings, such as health care facilities and congregate living spaces.

Vaccination and masks: two critical layers of protection to keep us safe

The vast majority of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths occur in unvaccinated people. Vaccination is the single most important thing people can do to protect themselves and those in the community. But no vaccine provides 100% protection. A small percentage of vaccinated people may develop COVID-19 and be able to pass the infection to others (though this is *much* less likely than for unvaccinated people). When vaccinated people do become infected, their illness is typically not severe.

Wearing a mask in indoor public spaces helps protect us all, including those who are unable to be protected by the vaccine, such as the 300,000 children in King County who aren't able to get vaccinated yet, and the many thousands of people who have immune systems that are weakened or suppressed, such as people undergoing cancer treatment or transplants.

In addition to masking, improving airflow and ventilation in public spaces are critical steps to reduce the risk of COVID-19 indoors. COVID-19 builds up in enclosed spaces as infected people breathe out air, and the risk increases where people are singing, shouting or exercising, and with closer contact and longer exposure.

Open windows and doors whenever possible to maximize the movement of air. Building and business owners should evaluate their HVAC systems to increase outside airflow, upgrade filtration where possible and consider the need for portable HEPA filtration.

Public Health – Seattle & King County also reminds the public that if you have **even mild symptoms**, whether or not you're vaccinated, **get a COVID-19 test and quarantine yourself** away from others while you wait

for your results. Information on where to get tested for COVID-19 is available at [King County's COVID-19 testing webpage](#).

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< VIDEO: DR. JEFF DUCHIN'S
COVID-19 PRESS BRIEFING
DISCUSSING NEW MASK
RECOMMENDATIONS – JULY 23,
2021

NEW KING COUNTY DATA:
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OF COVID-19 REFLECT THE
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AND ECONOMIC FACTORS >

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