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Bay Area Health Officials Urge Immediate Vaccination and Issue Orders Requiring Use of Face Coverings Indoors to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19
Counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Sonoma, and the City of Berkeley Indoor Masking Orders Take Effect Tuesday

San Francisco, CA - Vaccination continues to protect against severe COVID-19 illness, but with the COVID-19 Delta variant now infecting a small percentage of vaccinated people as well as many unvaccinated people, eight Bay Area health officers have issued Health Orders requiring masks indoors in public places. The Orders require all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, to wear face coverings when indoors in public settings, with limited exceptions, starting at 12:01 a.m. on Tuesday, August 3rd.

Vaccines remain the most powerful tool in the fight against COVID-19, including the Delta variant. Nonetheless, the Delta variant is infecting a small percentage of the vaccinated in the Bay Area - who still remain strongly protected against severe illness, hospitalization, and death. In those instances of infection in a vaccinated person, a face covering prevents further spread. Bay Area health officials urge all unvaccinated residents 12 and older to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

"COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in protecting people against severe illness and hospitalizations, and the vaccine continues to be our best way to protect ourselves, our families and our communities," said Dr. Naveena Bobba, San Francisco Acting Health Officer. "Indoor masking is a temporary measure that will help us deal with the Delta variant, which is causing a sharp increase in cases, and we know increases in hospitalizations and deaths will follow. When we all wear face coverings indoors, we are protecting our fellow residents and helping our healthcare workers."

These Health Orders aim to reduce community transmission of COVID-19 and protect everyone. Health officials are very concerned by the substantial levels of community transmission now found across the Bay Area, especially among unvaccinated people. In part, this is due to the widespread COVID-19 Delta variant, which is substantially more transmissible than previous forms of the virus. Recent information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also indicates that even fully vaccinated individuals can in some cases spread the Delta variant to others, and so indoor use of face coverings provides an important added layer of protection.

The new Health Orders require wearing a well-fitting mask indoors in public settings. Indoor settings, whether public or private, are higher risk for COVID-19 transmission, especially when you are with people you do not live with.

Health officials also recommend that all employers make face coverings available to individuals entering their businesses, and businesses are required to implement the indoor face covering order.

Today's Health Orders are consistent with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the California Department of Public Health, which recommend that fully vaccinated individuals wear masks while in indoor public settings. Bay Area Health Officers will continue to monitor data, including increasing vaccination throughout the region, to determine when the Orders can be adjusted or lifted.

The update to San Francisco's Safer Return Together Health Order<<https://sfdph.org/dph/alerts/coronavirus-healthorders.asp>> adds a new requirement for individuals, regardless of their vaccination status, to wear masks while in indoor public settings in San Francisco. There are limited exceptions for certain exempt individuals (like children under two). Other limited exceptions apply to designated settings where required ventilation measures have been put in place and when participants are engaged in an activity where masks may be removed. Refer to the health order<<https://sfdph.org/dph/alerts/coronavirus-healthorders.asp>> for more information.

The San Francisco Health Officer strongly encourages individuals to wear masks when they are in crowded outdoor spaces (parades, fairs and outdoor concerts, sports exhibitions, etc.), or while taking part in indoor gatherings at private homes with members of other households.

The San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) will make signage available for businesses and others to post regarding the new indoor masking requirements.

SFDPH is also providing updated guidance on what masks satisfy the requirements of the order. In most situations outside health care settings, wearing a face covering that is well-fitted to an individual and covers the nose and mouth especially while talking. A non-vented N95 mask is strongly recommended as a well-fitted mask, even if not fit-tested, to provide maximum protection. A scarf, ski mask, balaclava, bandana, turtleneck, collar, or single layer of fabric or any mask that has an unfiltered one-way exhaust valve do not satisfy the requirement. The guidance can be found at www.sfcddcp.org/maskingupdate<<http://www.sfcddcp.org/maskingupdate>>.

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