

Thursday, March 10, 2022

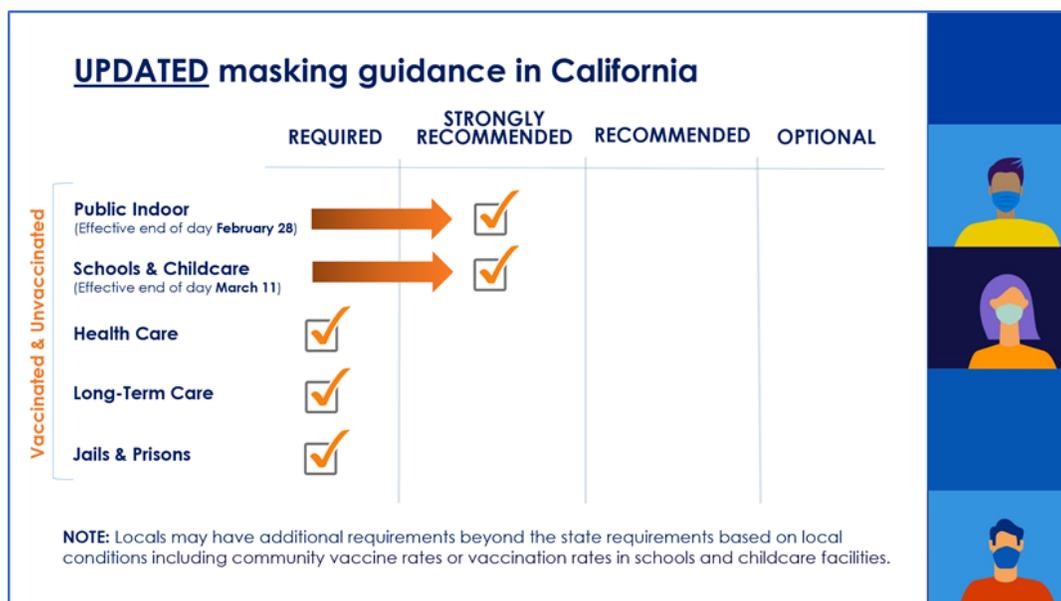
COVID-19 School and Vaccination Update

Dear San Mateo County Education and Child Care Community,

As case numbers, hospitalizations, and other COVID-19 indicators continue to move down, schools are beginning to imagine a post-pandemic classroom and school. In [guidance released yesterday](#), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) shared what that might look like with respect to COVID-19, “the next phase of mitigation in schools focuses on long-term prevention and our collective responsibility to preserve safe in-person schooling.” For now, their vision looks very familiar: “To mitigate in-school transmission, a multi-layered strategy continues to be important, including but not limited to getting vaccinated, wearing a mask, staying home when sick, isolating if positive, getting tested, and optimizing indoor air quality.”

Masks

Starting next week, masks in schools will be strongly recommended – no longer required. However, many schools plan to require masks at least until after spring break to help smooth the transition back after that holiday. Since COVID-19 is still a concern, CDPH will continue to require masking in health care and long-term care facilities. The graphic below shows where the State is with respect to its masking requirements. No information has yet been shared, however, on what data or conditions would trigger a move between the various masking guidance levels: required, strongly recommended, recommended, and optional.



The new CDPH guidance also addresses the flip side of the masking discussion and makes it clear that no person can be prevented from wearing a mask as a condition of participation in an activity or entry into a school, unless wearing a mask would pose a safety hazard. Moving forward, schools will need to build a culture where masks and no masks are all socially acceptable options as some families may choose to wear masks even when they become optional in schools.

Other Updates to COVID-19 Guidance

In case there were any lingering questions about whether physical distancing is a recommended safety layer in classrooms, the CDPH answered by recommending that schools focus on the other mitigation strategies for routine classroom instruction.

CDPH also strongly encourages K-12 educators to transition to a group contact tracing approach instead of using modified quarantine to address exposure to COVID-19 in their schools. In addition, CDPH clarified that schools do not need to test exposed students who had COVID-19 within the past 90 days.

With respect to masking during extracurricular activities, masking is still strongly recommended indoors, including during sports and playing of musical instruments. According to the CDPH, "If masks are not worn (or bell covers are not used) due to heavy exertion, it is strongly recommended that individuals undergo screening testing at least once weekly, unless they had COVID-19 in the past 90 days." So, testing is still a vital part of the equation for these specialized activities.

The County Office of Education will release an updated [Pandemic Recovery Framework](#) next week to reflect the change in guidance.

Vaccinations

As of this week, 60.2 percent of children ages 5-11 have received two doses of vaccine, up from 59.6 percent last week. The vaccination rate for youth ages 12-15 moved from 82 percent to 82.2 percent last week. The booster rate for this group is moving up as well, with 38.8 percent having received a COVID-19 booster. We expect this number to increase as SMC Health is now offering vaccinations to all children ages five and up at its weekly clinics in South San Francisco, Daly City, San Mateo, Half Moon Bay, Redwood City, and East Palo Alto. More information can be found on the [SMC Health website](#). In addition, CDPH is making mobile vaccination clinics available for schools and other sites. You can [learn more and sign up here](#).

Thank you all for your work to support our students and schools.



Nancy Magee
San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools

Please note: A copy of this letter in Spanish will be [posted here](#) shortly.