



# ALAMEDA COUNTY COVID-19 HEALTH EMERGENCY

COUNTY OF ALAMEDA ★ CALIFORNIA

Office of Emergency Services  
4985 Broder Blvd, Dublin, CA 94568

Alameda County Health Care Services Agency

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Alameda County and the City of Berkeley Align with California K-12 and Childcare Guidance on Masking** *Effective 11:59 pm on March 11, masks requirements become strong recommendations in K-12 and childcare settings in Alameda County.*

**ALAMEDA COUNTY** – After careful consideration and in the setting of strong improvement in local conditions, Alameda County and the City of Berkeley announced today that they will continue to align with the State’s guidance for K-12 and childcare settings and move masking requirements in these settings to strong recommendations after March 11.

Since the peak of the Omicron surge in January, cases have come down significantly overall as well as in highly impacted communities, and hospitalizations are well below their peak. When there are fewer cases, there is less virus circulating, making it safer to adopt changes to the strictest COVID restrictions.

While many communities and residents will welcome changes in mask policy, other residents and families have shared their fears. For some, these are not welcome changes, and many people who have experienced illness, death of loved ones, fear and trauma during the pandemic are understandably concerned.

“We are listening and finding additional ways to engage residents about their experience with COVID and what they need to be, and feel, healthy as conditions improve,” said Dr. Nicholas Moss, Alameda County Health Officer. “These decisions are about science and data, but they are also about the values we hold as one of the most diverse counties in the country. We are grateful our residents have embraced public health throughout the pandemic.”

Wearing high quality, well-fitting masks can protect the wearer and limit the spread of COVID-19 even when the legal requirement to mask has been removed at this time of lower overall risk. Alameda County and the State continue to strongly recommend masks in most public indoor settings.

Importantly, mask policy changes do not signal an end to the COVID-19 pandemic nor to its impacts on County residents and schools. Many schools in Alameda County serve communities of color and neighborhoods that have experienced the worst of COVID-19, and there are students across the County with health conditions that make them more vulnerable to severe illness. Some of our schools are under-resourced, affecting how they can respond to changes in the pandemic.

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“Our work advancing and protecting the health of the most impacted residents and supporting safe in-person education will not stop, and we will continue to partner with community representatives to push for better access to accurate COVID-19 information, vaccinations, testing, treatment and high-quality masks that offer more protection to those who want or need it,” said Dr. Moss.

Masks are still required for everyone in some settings like health care and long-term care facilities, on public transit, and congregate settings like correctional facilities and shelters. Businesses and workplaces can choose to maintain masking requirements for everyone at least 2 years of age. Masks must still be worn during the 10 days after known exposure to COVID-19 and for 10 days after infection if completing a shortened isolation.

“Cases are declining to near pre-surge levels everywhere, and this is the right time to move face masking guidance from requirement to recommendation in most settings,” said Dr. Moss. “COVID will be with us perhaps forever, and masks are tools we can depend on for protection. New surges that threaten public health and the lives of vulnerable residents may call for quick and assertive action and a new requirement to mask.”

Families should make decisions about whether their children should continue to mask (if not required) based on their risk and comfort levels, as well as the risk to the other members of their household. Wearing high-quality masks in public settings is one layer of protection families can utilize to protect themselves and vulnerable loved ones. If your child has health conditions or if they are immunocompromised, speak with their medical provider about masking. We strongly encourage parents, guardians, and schools to talk with their students about how to respect the decisions other students and families make about masking.

One of the most important actions families can take to limit the spread of COVID-19 is to keep their children home when they test positive or experience symptoms of COVID. Getting yourself and eligible children and family members vaccinated and boosted are proven to provide excellent protection against severe illness and hospitalization.

Testing and vaccination access for communities hardest hit by COVID, as well as health education and treatment navigation, remain priorities as we enter this next phase of the pandemic. We are also working to better support high quality mask access. Alameda County continues to partner with the Alameda County Office of Education to provide school districts with support as they implement the State’s K-12 guidance.

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Visit the Alameda County COVID-19 Data Dashboards webpage for data on case and vaccination rates: <https://covid-19.acgov.org/data>. For mental health guidance, resources, and support, visit the Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services: <https://www.acbhcs.org/>.

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