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## **Alameda County Requiring Masking for All Staff in Skilled Nursing Facilities While Working in Resident Care Areas**

*Continuing protections against COVID-19 for highly vulnerable populations from COVID-19.*

**ALAMEDA COUNTY, CA** – Alameda County issued a [Health Officer Order](#) requiring the continued use of masks by staff in skilled nursing facilities. This Order will become effective on April 3, 2023, at 12:01 a.m. and will be reviewed monthly. Visitors are strongly encouraged to wear masks while visiting these facilities although this is not required by the Order. As other remaining COVID-19 prevention requirements are retired and federal and state resources are sunseting, Alameda County is taking a cautious approach with these facilities. Alameda County will continue to align with the State on mask policy for all other settings after April 3. This is consistent with COVID-19 prevention policy moving from *strict* requirements to *recommendations* over time as population immunity and clinical outcomes have improved.

In taking this action, Alameda County Health Officer Dr. Nicholas Moss stated “Alameda County is moving cautiously with our skilled nursing facilities because they serve a large and highly vulnerable population of generally older adults with complex medical conditions. Some of the most devastating impacts of the pandemic occurred among residents of skilled nursing facilities.”

There are 66 licensed skilled nursing facilities in Alameda County with capacity for over 5,400 residents. COVID-19 has caused or contributed to the deaths of more than 2,400 Alameda County residents to date, and most of these deaths were in older adults. Through January of 2023, nearly 29% of Alameda County deaths were among people residing in skilled nursing facilities, and deaths in this population continue to be a major category for COVID-19 mortality. Despite Alameda County’s ongoing efforts to support vaccinations across the system, of the 55 facilities for which the County has complete data, nearly one third of residents have not yet received the latest bivalent COVID-19 booster vaccination. In addition, some residents with COVID-19 infection are not yet receiving medical treatment that can lower the risk of hospitalization and death among vulnerable groups. Alameda County continues to support a range of COVID-19 prevention strategies in skilled nursing facilities.

Alameda County residents are reminded that COVID is still circulating in the community and encouraged to continue using the proven methods to prevent COVID-19 and reduce the risk of hospitalization and death:

- Stay home if ill or COVID-19 positive,
- Keep up to date on vaccinations, including getting the updated COVID-19 booster,
- Wear a high-quality, well-fitted mask for added protection against infection,

- Gather small and outdoors to reduce risk or if gathering indoors, improve ventilation by opening doors and windows or running air filtration systems,
- Get tested if exposed or sick, and
- Plan how and where to access treatment and, if positive, contact a health care provider: do not wait until symptoms get worse.

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