



County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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ORDER OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER REQUIRING USE OF FACE MASKS INDOORS BY ALL INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE NOT PATIENTS IN SKILLED NURSING FACILITIES AND INFUSION CENTERS DURING RESPIRATORY VIRUS SEASON

Please read this Order carefully. Violation of or failure to comply with this Order is a misdemeanor punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both. (California Health and Safety Code § 120295, et seq.)

UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF CALIFORNIA HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE SECTION 120175, THE PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER OF THE COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ ("PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER") ORDERS:

1. This Order is issued due to the rise in respiratory viruses observed between fall and spring, a pattern that is anticipated to recur annually in Santa Cruz County ("County"). These respiratory viruses can lead to severe respiratory illness among County residents. The seasonal rise in their circulation is particularly dangerous for certain groups—such as infants, older adults, pregnant individuals, and those with weakened immune systems—who face a greater likelihood of severe disease and death. This Order is issued to curb the spread of these viruses to vulnerable populations and minimize the risk of severe illness and death.
2. This Order shall become effective at 12:00 am on November 1 of each year and will continue to March 31 of each year as a new seasonal requirement for the facilities subject to this Order unless it is rescinded, superseded, or amended in writing by the Public Health Officer.
3. All Skilled Nursing Facilities and Infusion Centers such as dialysis and chemotherapy centers in Santa Cruz County must require all individuals who are not patients, including healthcare workers and visitors, to wear a well-fitting Face Mask **during the direct provision of patient care or while working in Patient Facing Areas or visiting in Patient Facing Areas during the Respiratory Virus Season.**
4. **Requirement to Wear Face Masks.**
 - a. Regardless of vaccination status, all individuals who are not patients must always wear Face Masks during Respiratory Virus Season when indoors **during the direct provision of patient care or while working in or visiting in Patient Facing Areas** except:
 - i. Persons younger than two years old due to the risk of suffocation.

- ii. Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents wearing a Face Mask. This includes persons with a medical condition for whom wearing a Face Mask could obstruct breathing or who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a Face Mask without assistance.
 - iii. Persons who are hearing impaired, or communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
 - iv. Persons for whom wearing a Face Mask would create a risk to the person related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.
- b. All facilities subject to this Order must enforce this Face Mask requirement for all individuals who are not patients regardless of vaccination status except as otherwise provided in this Order. All facilities subject to this Order must post clearly visible and easy-to-read signage at all entry points to Patient Facing Areas to communicate the Face Mask requirements to all persons entering the Patient Facing Areas of the facility. In addition, facilities subject to this Order are required to provide Face Masks to individuals who will be in an area where Face Masks are required.
- c. In the event of an outbreak, or if a facility subject to this Order violates or fails to comply with this Order, the Public Health Officer may take additional action(s), including but not limited to requiring masking of patients to protect the public's health.
- d. **Definitions.** For purposes of this Order, the following definitions apply:
 - i. "Respiratory Virus Season" is defined as November 1 to March 31 of each year. In any given year, the Public Health Officer may adjust the dates of the Respiratory Virus Season based on respiratory virus surveillance data. If the Public Health Officer changes the dates of the Respiratory Virus Season, the Public Health Officer will notify Facilities subject to this Order through a Health Advisory and a notice posted on the County Health Services Agency Public Health Department's website.
 - ii. "Acute Care Facility" means a hospital that provides general acute physical or psychiatric care including the Psychiatric Health Facility, the Crisis Stabilization Program, the Hope Forward | Esperanza Adelante Youth Crisis Center.
 - iii. "Skilled Nursing Facility" means a healthcare facility that provides 24-hour skilled nursing and supportive care to residents/patients.
 - iv. "Infusion center" means any clinical setting, (either freestanding or hospital-affiliated), where patients receive dialysis or medication infusions.

- v. "Face Mask" means a high-quality surgical mask, KN95, KF94 or N95 that is well-fitted to an individual and covers the nose and mouth especially while talking. A Face Mask does not include a scarf, ski mask, balaclava, bandana, turtleneck, collar, or single layer of fabric or any mask that has an unfiltered one-way exhaust valve. Please refer to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) guidance found in [When and Why to Wear a Mask or Respirator](#) for more information.
- vi. "Personnel" means employees, volunteers, contractors or subcontractors, vendors, and emergency services personnel who work or provide services at the facility subject to this Order, regardless of whether a particular employee, volunteer, contractor, subcontractor, or vendor ordinarily engages in patient/resident care or contact.
- vii. "Patient Facing Area" means any area that patients regularly access to receive healthcare within a facility subject to this Order. Patient Facing Areas include lobbies, waiting rooms, examination rooms, patient wings, patient rooms, elevators, and hallways used by patients. Patient Facing Areas do not include administrative offices or staff break areas that are only accessible to personnel of the facility subject to this Order. Patient Facing Areas do not include areas such as cafeterias or gift shops that are not used for the provision of healthcare or to access areas where healthcare services are provided.

5. Recommendation to Wear Face Masks and Monitoring of Local and Internal Data

- a. It is strongly recommended that all Acute Care Facilities require all non-patients to wear Face Masks indoors during Respiratory Virus Season when in Patient-Facing Areas. This includes acute care hospitals, the Psychiatric Health Facility and Crisis Stabilization Program, the Hope Forward | Esperanza Adelante Youth Crisis Center, and maternity and surgery centers.
- b. It is strongly recommended that all healthcare facilities should monitor local and internal respiratory virus data including [local wastewater monitoring](#), test positivity, bed availability, employee absenteeism, and respiratory virus-related clinical care and implement masking requirements for all non-patients when these data indicate a high risk to patients or employees at any time of year.

- 6. Getting Vaccinated Is the Best Way to Reduce Risk.** Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza is the best way to protect the vaccinated person from infection, hospitalization, or death from COVID-19 and influenza, as well as to prevent harm to others by reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and influenza. Therefore, all eligible persons are strongly urged to be up to date on their COVID-19 and flu vaccinations. In addition, CDPH recommends that all adults 75 years and older receive the RSV vaccine as well as individuals 60 years and older who are at increased risk for severe RSV. RSV vaccine is also recommended for pregnant people between 32 and 36 weeks of pregnancy.

7. **Applicability.** All Skilled Nursing Facilities and Infusion Centers such as dialysis and chemotherapy centers in Santa Cruz County are ordered to comply with the applicable provisions of this Order. For clarity, individuals who do not currently reside in the County must comply with all applicable requirements of the Order when they are in the County. All individuals, businesses, and government agencies operating a facility subject to this Order in the County are required to follow the provisions of this Order. This Order applies to the unincorporated areas of the County as well as the cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and Watsonville.
- a. This Order does not restrict the ability of a facility subject to this Order to require Face Masks beyond the requirements of this Order. The Public Health Officer does not require patients/residents to wear masks, although masks are strongly recommended in these settings. Facilities subject to this Order should prominently display Face Masks for use by visitors as well as supply masks to staff and patients/residents if they desire to wear one.
8. **Obligation to Follow Stricter Order.** Where a conflict exists between this Order and any order issued by the State Public Health Officer, the Governor, or a State agency (such as the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA)) related to a pandemic, the most restrictive provision controls. For clarity, all individuals and entities must comply with the State Order, any mandatory guidance issued by the California Department of Public Health, any mandatory orders of the Governor or a State agency, or any other mandatory provision of State law to the extent it is stricter than any provision of this Order. Consistent with California Health and Safety Code section 131080 and the Health Officer Practice Guide for Communicable Disease Control in California, except if the State Public Health Officer issues an order expressly directed at this Order and based on a finding that a provision of this Order constitutes a menace to public health, any more restrictive measures in this Order continue to apply and control in this County. In addition, to the extent that any federal guidelines are inconsistent with this Order, this Order is controlling.
9. **Enforcement.** Pursuant to Government Code sections 26602 and 41601, and Health and Safety Code section 101029, the Public Health Officer requests that the Sheriff, all chiefs of police in the County, and all enforcement officers ensure compliance with and enforce this Order. The violation of any provision of this Order constitutes an imminent threat and menace to public health, constitutes a public nuisance, and is punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both.
10. **Copies.** Copies of this Order shall promptly be: (1) made available at the County offices at 701 Ocean St, Santa Cruz, CA 95060; (2) posted on the County Health Services Agency Public Health Division website (www.santacruzhealth.org); and (3) provided to any member of the public requesting a copy of this Order.
11. **Severability.** If any provision of this Order or its application to any person or circumstance is held to be invalid, the remainder of the Order, including the application of such part or provision to other persons or circumstances, shall not be affected and shall continue in full force and effect. To this end, the provisions of this Order are severable.

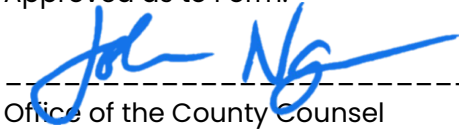
IT IS SO ORDERED:



Lisa B. Hernandez, MD, MPH
Public Health Officer of the County of Santa Cruz

Dated: 9/28/26

Approved as to Form:



Office of the County Counsel