

**Local Health Officer Directive for Wearing of Masks in Public Indoor Spaces
Snohomish Health District
August 10, 2021**

Whereas the novel coronavirus 2019 (SARS-CoV-2) that causes COVID-19 has led to over 45,000 reported cases, 2,143 hospitalizations, and 639 deaths in Snohomish County since January 2020; and

Whereas Snohomish County remains under a state of emergency declared by the Health Officer, the County Executive, the Governor, and the Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services; and

Whereas a fifth wave of increasing COVID-19 transmission has been underway since approximately July 1, 2021, leading to a 365% increase in weekly reported cases over the past six weeks, arriving at a 14-day case rate of 279 per 100,000 residents; and

Whereas this case rate is above the threshold for “high transmission” as defined by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); and

Whereas vaccination against COVID-19 in Snohomish County has been underway since December 2020 and 54% of the population is now fully vaccinated; and

Whereas approximately 230,000 Snohomish County residents ≥ 12 years of age remain unvaccinated despite widespread availability of vaccine for several months; and

Whereas approximately 125,000 Snohomish County children < 12 years of age remain unvaccinated due to their ineligibility for vaccination at this time; and

Whereas severely immunosuppressed individuals in the community have a reduced response to vaccine and remain vulnerable to severe disease due to COVID-19; and

Whereas SARS-CoV-2 spreads from person to person primarily through inhalation of air carrying very small droplets and aerosol particles that contain infectious virus; and

Whereas the more transmissible delta strain of SARS-CoV-2 now accounts for virtually all transmission occurring in Snohomish County; and

Whereas the rates of severe disease, hospitalization, and death due to COVID-19 were approximately 10 times higher among unvaccinated than among vaccinated persons in Snohomish County during the month of July 2021; and

Whereas occasional breakthrough infections do occur among fully vaccinated individuals, accounting for approximately 15% of Snohomish County cases in July 2021; and

Whereas use of well fitting, multi-layer cloth face coverings or medical procedure masks has been demonstrated to reduce generation of virus-transmitting aerosols from contagious individuals; and

Whereas use of well fitting, multi-layer cloth face coverings or medical procedure masks also has been demonstrated to reduce inhalation of virus-transmitting aerosols by the wearer; and

Whereas the CDC recommends all persons in high transmission communities like Snohomish County wear masks when present in public indoor spaces—regardless of vaccination status; and

Whereas the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation's most recent COVID-19 Results Briefing for Washington State on August 5, 2021, projected that rapid adoption of universal masking coverage could prevent 1,500 cumulative excess deaths due to COVID-19 between now and December 1, 2021, in Washington State; and

Whereas on July 26, 2021, the Local Health Officer joined other regional counties' health officers in recommending masking in public indoor spaces; and

Whereas reported cases and hospitalizations continue to increase; and

Whereas Snohomish County's hospital intensive care units collectively are operating at $\geq 90\%$ maximum capacity with little additional reserve to absorb a greater surge of COVID-19 hospitalizations; and

Whereas Washington State law, RCW 70.05.070(2), (3), requires and empowers the Local Health Officer to take such action as is necessary to maintain health and to control and prevent the spread of any contagious or infectious diseases within the jurisdiction; and

Whereas state regulation, WAC 246-100-036, requires the Local Health Officer, when necessary, to institute disease control measures as he, she, or they deem necessary based on his, her, or their professional judgment, current standards of practice, and the best available medical and scientific information;

Therefore, based upon the preceding, the Local Health Officer hereby finds that:

Use of face masks for everyone ≥ 5 years of age within indoor public spaces is reasonable and necessary in Snohomish County to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission until the Snohomish Health District confirms that the COVID-19 risk to Snohomish County residents is substantially reduced based on considerations that include but may not be limited to: COVID-19 disease rates declining to low levels of community transmission as defined by the CDC;

COVID-19 hospitalizations and death rates stabilizing at low levels; a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine being authorized by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in children 5 years through 11 years of age.

EFFECTIVE Thursday, August 12, 2021, at 6:00 a.m., as the Local Health Officer I hereby direct as follows:

Everyone ≥ 5 years of age in Snohomish County must wear a face covering within indoor public spaces.

Children age two, three, or four years old, while exempt from this official directive, are recommended to wear a face covering with the assistance and close supervision of an adult in accordance with the current [Order of the Secretary of Health](#).

Everyone in correctional facilities, homeless shelters, schools, childcare, public transportation, and health care settings, including doctor's offices, long-term care, and hospitals, must also wear a well-fitted mask in accord with state requirements already in place.

This DIRECTIVE applies to indoor spaces that are open to the public, including retail, grocery stores, government buildings, and other businesses and places where members of the public can enter freely; it does not apply to indoor non-public spaces, including businesses, offices, and other places of employment with limited access. Employers should continue to follow current guidance and [requirements from the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries on worker safety](#).

This DIRECTIVE also does not apply to outdoor spaces. Please follow current Washington State Department of Health guidance and directives on the use of masks outdoors.

I strongly urge all people in Snohomish County to voluntarily comply with this DIRECTIVE, and likewise direct all businesses that are open to the public, including grocery and other retail establishments, to continue implementing policies and practices to ensure that their customers and employees wear face masks in order to protect the health of their customers, workers, and the community.

This DIRECTIVE will remain in effect until the Snohomish Health District confirms that COVID-19 disease rates decline to low levels of transmission as defined by the CDC or until this directive is otherwise rescinded.



Christopher Spitters, MD, MPH
Health Officer

August 10, 2021
Date