

Frequently Asked Questions on the Masking Directive

Is this a directive or a mandate?

This is a statement from the Health Officer directing people to wear masks when in public spaces indoors. While it is not a mandate carrying legal penalties, it implies a duty to comply. Also remember that there are still three other state and federal orders in place as well. Each document below outlines a particular area of responsibility and enforcement.

- Updated state [workplace health and safety guidance](#) for workers on masks from the Washington Department of Labor & Industries.
- [DOH Secretary's order \(PDF\)](#) that explains general masking requirements for unvaccinated and fully vaccinated individuals, and exceptions to the requirements.
- [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention order](#): This order from the CDC requires the wearing of masks by travelers to prevent spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. This order must be followed by passengers on all public transportation including but not limited to airplanes, ships, ferries, trains, subways, buses, taxis, and ride-shares.

What is the penalty for a business or individual not following the directive?

Enforcement for the three state and federal orders are explained in the links above. It is expected that individuals, businesses and organizations will comply with the masking directive for Snohomish County effective August 12, 2021, but there is not an enforcement process or penalty attached at this time. If you have concerns about organizations not complying with the directive, you can send information to complaints@snohd.org.

Does this directive apply to people with disabilities or medical exemptions?

No, individuals with disabilities or other medical situations that are unable to wear masks are not required to do so. Where possible, consider other face covering options or limit situations that require going into crowded indoor settings without a mask.

DOH guidelines for schools states that teachers & staff do not need to wear masks when not around students. Does the mask directive override that?

In general, yes. Teachers and staff working indoors should wear masks, regardless of the presence of students and regardless of the staff members' vaccination status.

Does this apply to churches and other faith-based organizations?

The directive is for places where members of the public can enter freely, which would include faith-based organizations and services. All singers and speakers should also be masked indoors.

What about restaurants, bars and other food or drink establishments?

Masks should be worn when entering the establishment, when speaking to others, and when not eating or drinking. This directive does not impose any capacity or distancing requirements.

Do gyms, fitness studios and other recreational or entertainment facilities need to follow the directive?

Yes, all indoor spaces that are open to the public, customers or clients should have all individuals wearing face coverings. People do not need a mask when in an indoor pool or hot tub, but should wear them when out of the water, in locker rooms, etc. This directive does not impose any capacity or distancing requirements.

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Can people wear something other than a mask, like a face shield?

[Some masks work better than others](#) to help slow the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. Note: N95 respirators approved by CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) should be prioritized for healthcare personnel.

The CDC does not recommend using face shields as a substitute for masks, as they have large gaps below and alongside the face. Respiratory droplets may escape and reach others around you, potentially exposing others, and will not protect you from respiratory droplets from other people.

If you must wear a face shield instead of a mask, like for interacting with those who are deaf or hearing impaired:

- Choose a face shield that wraps around the sides of your face and extends below your chin or a hooded face shield. This is based on the limited available data that suggest these types of face shields are better at preventing spray of respiratory droplets.
- Wash your hands after removing the face shield. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth when removing it.
- Clean and disinfect reusable face shields according to the manufacturer's instructions or by following CDC face shield cleaning instructions. If you use a disposable face shield, wear it once and throw it away according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Why do I need a mask if I am fully vaccinated?

The CDC has stated that people in high transmission areas (including Snohomish County) should continue to wear a mask indoors to maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent possibly spreading it to others. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and highly effective at preventing serious illness and death, but it is still possible to become infected, but at a much lower rate than vaccinated persons—about 80-90% lower. If you become infected, you can spread it to others.

Masks also help protect the unvaccinated – which includes kids under age 12 who are not yet eligible for vaccines. Unvaccinated people are at a much higher risk of getting sick with and spreading the disease, as well as developing complications from COVID-19.

Won't this directive hurt our local businesses?

The directive does not impose any capacity or operational restrictions. Instead, it provides clear guidance that everyone should wear a mask when in public spaces indoors. This is our best public health advice to protect you, your family, and our communities. This will help reduce the risk of COVID-19 to the public, including customers and workers. It will also help stem the increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations and decrease the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant happening in our state.

How long will this directive be in place?

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. Other factors to be considered may also include testing positivity rates, healthcare system capacity, and hospitalization and death rates.