

## MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Kristin Prelipp, Communications Manager and Public Information Officer  
kprelipp@orangecountync.gov or 919-245-2462

LINK TO MEDIA RELEASE

### **Mask Mandate to be amended March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022 to No Longer Require Masks in Public, Indoor Spaces**

*Orange County leaders say decision is contingent on COVID-19 Community Levels.*

HILLSBOROUGH, N.C. Mar. 2, 2022 — Effective Monday, March 7, 2022, Orange County will no longer require masks in public, indoor spaces if key COVID-19 metrics continue to reach medium and low community levels.

The following metrics — determined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — will serve as the indicators. They currently show Orange County is in the high-risk category.

- New cases — New COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people in the last seven days is less than 200. Orange County is at 150.87.
- New hospital admissions — New COVID-19 hospital admissions per 100,000 people in the last seven days is less than 20. Orange County is at 28.29.
- Inpatient beds — Staffed inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients (7-day average) is less than 15%. Orange County is at 12.86%.
- Read more about Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Community Levels at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html>

Orange County leaders will rely on the most up-to-date information. Please note that the CDC dashboard [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) is not updated daily. If the numbers trend up to the high community transmission level, Orange County will reserve the right to amend the mask mandate to again require masks in public, indoor spaces.

Once the mandate is amended, businesses and other organizations can continue to require customers or visitors to wear a mask in their establishments. The CDC also recommends that individuals who are unvaccinated should continue to wear a mask or face covering when indoors or in crowded areas to minimize the potential spread of the virus.

“I appreciate everything community members and businesses have done to lower the spread of COVID-19 in Orange County. These efforts have saved lives,” said Renée Price, Chair of the Orange County Board of Commissioners. “We ask everyone to respect the decisions made by individuals who continue to wear masks, as well as the rules instituted at businesses, health care facilities and service providers.”

The planned change aligns with Gov. Cooper’s statement on Feb. 17, which encouraged schools and local governments to end their mask mandates. Federal regulations still require masks in some places, such as long-term care facilities and public transportation including Chapel Hill Transit.

“While relaxing indoor masking requirements is a shift towards a ‘new normal’ of living with the disease, people should continue to choose risk reduction strategies such as wearing well-fitted masks in high-risk settings; staying home and testing when symptomatic; testing before gatherings; and improving indoor ventilation,” said Orange County Health Director, Quintana Stewart. “Staying up to date on vaccinations remains the most important way to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death.”

According to data from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 76% of Orange County community members are fully vaccinated with more than 68,000 in receipt of their booster once eligible.

### **State Recommendations**

The guidance below from the Department of Health and Human Services is effective March 7, 2022.

#### Individuals

- Stay up to date on COVID-19 vaccines and booster.
- Get tested if you have symptoms or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, and stay away from others (following isolation guidelines) if you are sick or test positive.
- Get treatment early if you are at risk for severe illness.
- Wear a mask around others if you have COVID-19 symptoms.
- Wear a mask if you are at high risk for severe illness or if you want an added layer of protection.
- Wear a mask if you have a COVID infection or exposure.
- Wear a mask if you are not up to date on your vaccines.

#### High-Risk Settings

These include long-term care facilities, correctional facilities, homeless shelters, and health care settings.

- Provide vaccines and boosters to residents and staff.
- Provide testing to residents and staff.
- Connect those who are at high-risk for severe illness to treatment.
- Follow all CDC guidance, including recommendations for masking.

#### Schools

- Promote vaccination for students and staff.
- Participate in the School Testing Program.

- Consider moving to voluntary masking, at the discretion of local authorities, as universal masking is a less important tool in lower risk settings like schools.

#### Childcare

- Promote vaccination for students and staff.
- Consider moving to voluntary masking, at the discretion of local authorities, as universal masking is a less important tool in lower risk settings like childcare

#### Business

- Promote and/or require vaccination for staff and customers.
- Can require masking of staff and patrons at their discretion.

#### Related Links:

- CDC COVID Data Tracker: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>
- CDC COVID-19 Community Levels: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/community-levels.html>
- NCDHHS Vaccine Appointments: <https://takemyshot.nc.gov>
- Amendment to the Declaration of a State of Emergency in Orange County: <https://www.orangecountync.gov/DocumentCenter/View/19331/Orange-County-Declaration-of-Emergency-Amendment-3-7-22-signed>

#### Related Graphics:

- Why are some people still wearing masks in public? PDF: [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#)

###