



DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Promoting and protecting health, well-being, self-sufficiency, and safety of all in Marin County.

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY



October 30, 2024

Masking and Vaccination in Health Care and Long-term Care Facilities

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DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues:

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PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

Last fall and winter, we saw substantial waves of RSV, flu and COVID-19, and [a similar pattern is expected this year](#). From November 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025, Marin County Public Health:

- **Strongly recommends** that health care and long-term care facilities implement masking policies.
- **Urges** all staff and visitors of health care facilities and long-term care facilities to wear high-quality, well-fitted masks when in close contact (less than 6 feet) with patients and residents.

All staff and visitors (regardless of vaccination status) of health care facilities and long-term care facilities should wear high-quality, well-fitting masks when they have close contact with patients and residents. During the winter respiratory virus season, masking and vaccination mitigate the risk of widespread transmission in healthcare and residential environments.

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Actions Requested of Facilities

- **Review and implement [guidance](#)** to meet the requirements of the Cal/OSHA Aerosol Transmissible Diseases standard (California Code of Regulations, title 8, section 5199) to reduce the risk of ATD infection to their employees.
- **Review and implement [CalOSHA COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#)** (in effect through Feb. 3, 2025)
 - COVID cases who return to work **must wear a face covering indoors for 10 days** from the start of symptoms or if the person did not have COVID-19 symptoms, 10 days from the date of their first positive COVID-19 test.
- **Develop and implement a masking policy** that requires staff and visitors to wear high-quality, well-fitted masks when in close contact (< 6 feet) with patients and residents.
- **Vaccination Campaigns:** [Promote and provide vaccinations](#) for influenza, COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses for both residents and staff.
- **Hand Hygiene:** Ensure that hand hygiene protocols are strictly followed, including regular handwashing and the use of hand sanitizer.
- **Environmental Cleaning:** Increase the frequency and intensity of cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, particularly high-touch areas.
- **Monitor respiratory virus activity:** Enhance enforcement of infection prevention and control policies and procedures during periods of [heightened respiratory virus activity](#) (CDPH [Weekly Respiratory Virus Report](#)).

- **Communication:** Provide clear and consistent communication to staff, residents, visitors, and families about the measures being taken and the importance of cooperation.
- **Education and Training:** Regularly train staff on infection control practices and the importance of recognizing early symptoms of respiratory infections.

Rationale

- **Infection Control:** [Using masks](#) for source control and personal protection significantly reduces the transmission of respiratory pathogens. Studies have shown that mask wearing can lower the risk of infection among healthcare workers and patients.
- **Community Transmission:** During high levels of community transmission of respiratory illnesses, masking policies protect vulnerable populations, including the elderly and the immunocompromised.
- **Healthcare-Associated Infections (HAIs):** Evidence indicates that masking helps reduce HAIs, improving overall patient safety (e.g., preventing respiratory outbreaks and nosocomial infections).
- **Systematic Reviews:** Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have concluded that mask use is effective in reducing respiratory virus transmission. These reviews are supported by existing research and expert consensus.
- **Impact on Healthcare Workers and Residential Care Staff:** Studies show that masking protects healthcare workers from exposure to pathogens, reducing absenteeism and the risk of transmitting infections to patients.

Background

Under California Code of Regulations, Title 17, communicable disease control is a basic service that must be provided by a local health department. California Health and Safety Code (HSC) § 120175 requires health officers to take action to prevent the spread of disease. Under this authority, from 2013 thru 2020, Marin County Public Health issued public health orders requiring health care facilities to implement a vaccination program that required their health care workers to receive an annual influenza vaccination or mask if they declined vaccination.

During the pandemic, state and federal laws mandated COVID-19 vaccinations for healthcare workers. Mandatory masking orders in Marin County healthcare facilities were also implemented to reduce transmission risks. In the 2023 – 2024 winter respiratory virus season, Marin County, alongside other Bay Area counties, instituted a [health order](#) that required masking in hospitals and skilled nursing facilities for the fall and winter months. This season, Marin County Public Health is *not* issuing an order but is encouraging voluntary compliance with masking and vaccination recommendations.

Legal Framework

State law requires that general acute care hospitals and certain other health care facilities offer influenza vaccination to employees and, for those employees who decline vaccination, maintain a record of the signed declination form (CA Code of Regulations [§5199 Aerosol Transmissible Diseases](#)).

Reference

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- Klompas M, Baker MA, Rhee C, Baden LR. *Strategic Masking to Protect Patients from All Respiratory Viral Infections*. N Engl J Med. 2023 Jul 6;389(1):4-6. doi: [10.1056/NEJMp2306223](#). Epub 2023 Jun 14. PMID: 37314330.
- Jefferson T, Dooley L, Ferroni E, Al-Ansary LA, van Driel ML, Bawazeer GA, Jones MA, Hoffmann TC, Clark J, Beller EM, Glasziou PP, Conly JM. *Physical interventions to interrupt or reduce the spread of respiratory viruses*. Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2023 Jan 30;1(1):CD006207. doi: [10.1002/14651858.CD006207.pub6](#). PMID: 36715243; PMCID: PMC9885521.

Definitions

Health Care Facilities: General Acute Care Hospitals, Long Term Acute Care Hospitals, Psychiatric Hospitals, Skilled Nursing Facilities, Congregate Living Health Facility, Dialysis Centers, and Infusion Centers.

Long-term care facility: Licensed and unlicensed community care facility; extended care facility; adult day health care facility, and residential care facility for the elderly (RCFE)

Designated Winter Respiratory Virus Period: The period from November 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025.

Sincerely,

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