

CDC Drops Masking Recommendations for Most Healthy Individuals

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As COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations fall and certain states and localities drop mask mandates, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its [mask guidance](#) on February 25, 2022, dropping public indoor mask recommendations for the majority of groups of individuals.

The CDC's new guidance reflects a shift in the way the agency is analyzing data to determine mitigation strategies. The agency's goals are to direct efforts toward protecting high-risk individuals and preventing COVID-19 from overwhelming healthcare systems. Previous CDC guidance classified counties on levels of transmission based on cases and positive test rates. The new "COVID-19 [Community Levels](#)" metrics classify counties based on new COVID-19 hospitalizations, hospital capacity, and new COVID-19 cases. The CDC classified counties as high, medium, or low. While under the old metrics, nearly all U.S. residents lived in areas of high or substantial transmission, under the new system, approximately 70 percent of U.S. residents live in a county with low or medium COVID-19 community levels.

The new recommendations are as follows:

- In **low-level** communities, individuals may choose to mask based on individual preference and risk.
- In **medium-level** communities, the CDC advises that those who are immunocompromised or otherwise at high risk for severe illness should mask. Those who live with or have social contact with high-risk individuals should consider masking around such individuals.
- In **high-level** communities, all individuals two-years-old and older should mask indoors in public, regardless of vaccination status or individual risk. Those who are immunocompromised or are otherwise high risk should choose a [high-quality mask](#) or [respirator](#).

These recommendations have a greater focus on individual risk than previous recommendations. In its telebriefing announcing the changes, the CDC noted that those who wear high-quality masks are well protected, even if around unmasked individuals.

Regardless of community level, the CDC continues to recommend [staying up to date](#) (including any boosters) with vaccines and following CDC recommendations for [isolation, quarantine](#), and [testing](#).

Key Takeaways

Employers following previous CDC guidance may want to examine their own masking policies, while continuing to comply with any state or local orders. For employee relations reasons, many employers may want to communicate to employees that the company is aware of the new guidance and is evaluating potential changes to workplace rules and procedures in each jurisdiction. Employers that opt to lift indoor masking requirements may want to consider directing concerned employees to the CDC's guidance on types of masks in order to educate employees about high-quality mask options.

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