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WINTER ADVISORY REGARDING FACE COVERINGS

Updated December 21, 2021

This Advisory has been updated as of December 21, 2021.

COVID-19 vaccines and vaccine boosters are highly effective at protecting against serious illness, hospitalization and death and every individual who is eligible and works, studies or resides in Massachusetts is strongly urged to get vaccinated and boosted. The Department of Public Health urges all eligible residents to get vaccinated against COVID-19 because vaccination provides the most effective protection from severe illness associated with COVID-19.

In response to the spread of the Delta variant and the emerging Omicron variant, the Department of Public Health now advises that all residents, regardless of vaccination status, wear a mask or face covering when indoors (and not in your own home). The DPH particularly urges this recommendation if you have a weakened immune system, or if you are at increased risk for severe disease because of your age or an underlying medical condition, or if someone in your household has a weakened immune system, is at increased risk for severe disease, or is unvaccinated.

Your primary care physician can advise you whether you are at increased risk. Information from the Centers for Disease Control regarding the conditions that may put you at increased risk can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>.

All people in Massachusetts (regardless of vaccination status) are **required to continue wearing face coverings in certain settings**, including transportation and health care facilities. Please see www.mass.gov/maskrules for a complete list of venues where face coverings have remained mandatory since May 29, 2021.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's current mask requirement and [Policy on Vaccination Rate Threshold](#) issued on September 27th, 2021 is not impacted by this advisory. As a result of the most comprehensive and robust school testing program in the country, with 99% of public, collaborative and charter districts enrolled, Massachusetts elementary and secondary schools remain open and safe for children and youth to engage in learning, with over 325,000 school days saved. Only schools who can demonstrate they have high vaccination rates of over 80% of all individuals vaccinated are able to remove masks for vaccinated individuals upon a written attestation.

For individuals who are not fully vaccinated, it is especially important that you wear a face covering or mask any time you are indoors and not in your own home to reduce the chance that you may spread COVID-19 to other people. People who show no symptoms of illness may still be able to spread COVID-19.

An individual is fully vaccinated two weeks after their second dose in a two-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or two weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine. However, if a fully vaccinated individual becomes symptomatic, they should be tested and wear a mask until receiving test results.

When you wear a face covering or cloth mask, it should:

- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face,
- Be secured with ties or ear loops,
- Include multiple layers of fabric,
- Allow for breathing without restriction, and
- Be able to be laundered and machine dried without damage or change to shape.

For more information, please refer to the CDC at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

This advisory may change based on public health data and further guidance from the CDC.