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CDC recommends universal masking in schools in latest guidance update

As the delta variant of COVID-19 sweeps through areas of the United States with alarming speed, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on July 27 released **updated guidance** recommending universal masking indoors in K-12 schools — regardless of vaccination status.

In addition, the CDC is recommending universal masking indoors for all people in areas with high (50-100 cases per 100,000 people per day over a seven-day period) or substantial (>100 cases in the same time period) COVID-19 transmission. **According to CDC data**, about 63 percent of U.S. counties currently have high or substantial COVID-19 spread, with some counties reporting more than 300 cases per day. The delta variant is predominant in the U.S. with 80 percent of sequenced samples caused by the variant, according to CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky.

“Today we have new science related to the delta variant that requires us to update the guidance regarding what you can do when you are fully vaccinated,” Walensky said in a press call. “The delta variant behaves uniquely, differently, from past strains of the virus that cause COVID-19. Information on the delta variant from several states and other countries indicate that, in rare occasions, some vaccinated people infected with the delta variant after vaccination may be contagious and spread the virus to others. This new science is worrisome and, unfortunately, warrants an update to our recommendations.”

The CDC continues to strongly encourage everyone to get vaccinated. Walensky said data shows that vaccines reduce serious illness seven-fold and hospitalization 20-fold. “Vaccinated individuals continue to represent a very small amount of transmission around the country,” she said.

In response to a reporter’s question, Walensky further clarified why the CDC changed its recommendation to universal masking in K-12 schools, including lower vaccination numbers than expected at this point. “Next week, we have many school systems that are starting around the country and ... children aged 11 and less are not going to be able to be vaccinated. And with only 30 percent of our kids between 12 and 17 fully vaccinated now, more cases in the country and a real effort to try to make sure that our kids can safely get back to full, in-person learning — we’re recommending that everybody wear masks right now.”

The updated guidance brings the CDC in alignment with **California Department of Public Health guidance** released on July 12, which requires universal masking in K-12 schools. The state's guidance was issued based on a multi-layered mitigation approach recognizing that physical distancing is not possible in many California school facilities. The CDPH guidance notes that “masks are one of the most effective and simplest safety mitigation layers to prevent in-school transmission of COVID-19



California School Boards Association | 3251 Beacon Blvd., West Sacramento, CA 95691
Phone: (800) 266-3382 | Fax: (916) 371-3407
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