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## PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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Hello Thurston County!

Our COVID-19 case rates have been steadily declining and there are a lot of changes headed our way. We are continuing to see a decrease transmission rates in Thurston County. Today our 14-day COVID-19 transmission rate is 214.4 cases per 100,000 population. This is down from our peak during the Omicron surge of 3,040 cases per 100,000 population over 14 days. The number of hospitalized individuals with COVID-19 has declined significantly as well.

Starting March 12, 2022 masking will no longer be required in most indoor public settings. Some settings continue to have a masking requirement.

### Masks Are Still Required:

- In hospitals, dentist offices, medical facilities, and other health care settings.
- In long-term care settings, including home care, home health, and home hospice.
- In locations required by federal law (e.g., on public transit, taxis, and ride-share vehicles).
- In correctional facilities.
- When following [quarantine or isolation period guidelines](#) for wearing a “well-fitting mask” per the Washington State Department of Health.
- When an employer chooses to require masks for employees or patrons.

The change in the masking requirement reflects a transition to encouraging individuals to consider the risks of COVID-19 transmission in their community, and the risk of severe illness for themselves and those who might be exposed in their household or community if they become ill. The Washington State Department of Health has a great [data dashboard](#), and I encourage people to use this tool as they consider their choices regarding masking.

Layered precautions are still key to avoiding COVID-19 infection. These include:

- Staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccines by becoming fully vaccinated and getting a booster dose when eligible. Getting vaccinated is the best way to stay protected, as it both decreases your risk of testing positive for COVID-19, as well as risk of severe infection and death. Data for Washington State can be found [here](#).
- Continuing to avoid crowded areas, choosing to wear a mask in crowded indoor settings, or when COVID-19 transmission risk is high
- Masking when around those who are high risk of severe disease
- Maintaining hand hygiene as well as covering coughs and sneezes
- Staying home when sick and getting tested

This is a transition point in the pandemic and as I look at local COVID-19 transmission and hospitalization rates I am hopeful. I am continuing to monitor reported COVID-19 outbreaks, COVID-19 transmission dynamics, and COVID-19 hospitalization metrics so that we can respond if the situation changes.

Wishing you the best of health,  
Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH