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County of Sacramento

DATE: February 15, 2022
TO: School Superintendents and School Leaders
FROM: Olivia Kasirye, MD, MS, Public Health Officer *Olivia Kasirye MD*
SUBJECT: State of California COVID-19 Masking Requirements for K-12 Schools

On February 16, 2022, State and local Health Orders will be adjusted, impacting which settings in California are covered by mask requirements. These changes do not directly impact schools as the California Department of Public Health will continue to require masks in several specific settings throughout California, including K-12 schools and child care settings.

The State of California has announced their intention to re-evaluate the statewide mask requirement for schools on February 28, 2022. We expect an announcement about potential adjustments to the requirement at that time. It is essential that schools continue to abide by all applicable mask requirements for numerous reasons:

COVID-19 Continues to Impact Sacramento County

Sacramento County experienced an unprecedented surge of COVID-19 cases during the most recent surge. Despite a drastic reduction in cases in recent weeks, case rates and hospitalizations remain high in our community.

Masking In Schools Is Required By Law

California Department of Public Health (CDPH) [Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) requires mandatory universal masking indoors in public and private K-12 settings. Failure to comply with this CDPH directive unnecessarily endangers students and exposes districts and school personnel to legal and financial liability, as outlined in this [CDPH Letter to School Leaders regarding the Requirement for Universal Masking Indoors at K-12 Schools](#).

Masks In Schools Are Effective

Masks are the primary COVID-19 mitigation tool in schools and they have helped California schools remain open, even during surges. In Fall 2021, California accounted for less than 0.5% of school closures despite accounting for 12% of US students. Upon return to school this fall, pediatric COVID-19 hospitalizations were approximately **3.5 to 4.5 times lower** in California than they were in states where masks were not required in schools (Texas and Florida).

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Masks Help Keep Schools Open for In-Person Instruction

Schools are the safest place for students to learn. Since returning to in-person instruction, schools in Sacramento County have successfully implemented masking requirements to limit on-campus spread of COVID-19. In-person instruction is not only necessary for academic success; it is essential for students' emotional well-being. COVID-19 outbreaks interfere with in-person instruction and have the potential to cause school closures, which can cause parents to miss work and lead to wider societal and economic impacts.

Vaccination Rates Among School Aged Children Remain Low

Students aged 5 and older are now eligible to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Unfortunately, many school-aged children remain unvaccinated. In Sacramento County, 62.2% of 12 to 19 year olds are partially vaccinated and only 35.3% of 5 to 11 year olds are partially vaccinated.

As leaders in our community, we have an obligation to keep children healthy and safe. COVID-19 has challenged that duty tremendously over the past two years. This school year, we have been largely successful in balancing COVID-19 mitigation with the need to keep schools open and I implore you to stay the course and continue to follow the legal requirement for masks in schools.