



County of Santa Cruz

Health Services Agency
1080 Emeline Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Face Covering Order, November 21, 2021 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the Universal Indoor Face Covering Order and why is it being issued now?

The November 21, 2021 Universal Indoor Face Covering Order broadly requires everyone, regardless of vaccination status, to wear face coverings indoors to the greatest extent possible. However, as described in the Order and below, face coverings can be removed to engage in activities that inherently cannot be done with them on, such as eating and drinking.

The Order is being issued in light of the recent increase in COVID-19 cases. Vaccination, including boosters remains the best and most effective tool in protecting against severe illness, hospitalization, and death. In addition to vaccination, universal indoor use of face coverings is the least disruptive and most immediately impactful additional measure to take.

The Order is broadly in line with recent recommendations from [the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [the California Department of Public Health](#) for universal indoor use of face coverings regardless of vaccination status at the current moment, as well as [the prior recommendation](#) from the County Public Health Department to do likewise.

How does the Santa Cruz County order differ from other similar indoor face covering orders issued in the Bay Area?

While most Bay Area indoor face covering orders are similar in effect, the Santa Cruz County order also requires use of face coverings at *private* indoor events (such as parties or gatherings in a residence). This is because the risk of COVID-19 transmission is similar in such settings. Most other orders urge use of face coverings in such settings, but do not require it.

What are other key recommendations from the Health Officer at this time?

While not a legal mandate, the Health Officer urges *businesses and governmental entities* to take the following additional steps to help keep the community safe:

- Require all personnel to be fully vaccinated (and verify their actual vaccination such as by obtaining copies of vaccination cards or digital vaccination records), subject only to limited exceptions required by law.
- Check the vaccination status of customers, and only allow fully vaccinated customers into facilities, particularly higher-risk settings such as those where face coverings must be removed to engage in activities.
- Move as many activities outdoors as possible. Where this is not possible, maximize ventilation as described [here](#).
- Mandate frequent testing of all unvaccinated personnel or customers.

For *individuals*, the Health Officer urges everyone to:

- Get vaccinated as soon as possible, if you're not already fully vaccinated. Information on how to get vaccinated is available at www.santacruzhealth.org/coronavirusvaccine.
- Avoid indoor activities that require removal of face coverings, and instead choose outdoor alternatives or avoid the activity altogether. If you must be indoors, maximize ventilation (such as by opening windows and doors or adjusting the HVAC system), limit the amount of time spent indoors, and limit the number of people present indoors.
- Wear face coverings outdoors in crowded settings.
- Get immediately tested if you have any symptoms of COVID-19. Information on where to get tested is available at www.santacruzhealth.org/testing.

What kind of face covering should I wear?

Under the Order, a face covering must be well-fitted to an individual and cover the nose and mouth especially while talking, consistent with the guidance of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). A face covering does *not* include a scarf, ski mask, balaclava, bandana, turtleneck, collar, or single layer of fabric or any mask that has an unfiltered one-way exhaust valve.

Not all face coverings are equally effective, and a medical-grade (i.e., surgical) mask offers greater protection and is advisable. Please see CDPH guidance on [types of face coverings](#) for more information.

Who is exempt from wearing a face covering indoors?

Consistent with state guidelines, the following people are generally exempt from indoor use of face coverings:

- Medical or Safety Exemption. A person does not need to wear a face covering when they can show: (1) a medical professional has provided a written exemption to the face covering requirement, based on the person's medical condition, other health concern, or disability; or (2) that they are hearing impaired, or communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication; or (3) wearing a face covering while working would create a risk to the person related to their work as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines. In accordance with California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and

United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, if a person is exempt from wearing a face covering, they still must wear an alternative, such as a face shield with a drape on the bottom edge, unless they can show either: (1) a medical professional has provided a written exemption to this alternative requirement, based on the person's medical condition, other health concern, or disability; or (2) wearing an alternative face covering while working would create a risk to the person related to their work as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

- Children. In accordance with CDPH and CDC guidelines, any child younger than two years old must not wear a face covering because of the risk of suffocation. Children age two to nine and their accompanying parents or caregivers should not be refused any essential service based on a child's inability to wear a face covering (for example, if a four-year-old child refuses to keep a face covering on in a grocery store), but the parent or caregiver should when possible take reasonable steps to have the child wear a face covering to protect others and minimize instances when children without face coverings are brought into settings with other people. Parents and caregivers of children age two to nine years must supervise the use of face coverings to ensure safety and avoid misuse.
- Personal Protective Equipment. A person does not need to wear a face covering when wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) that is more protective than a face covering, such as an N95 respirator, as required by (i) any workplace policy or (ii) any local, state, or federal law, regulation, or other mandatory guidance. When a person is not required to wear such PPE, they must wear a face covering unless otherwise exempted.

For what kinds of activities are you allowed to remove a face covering?

To the extent allowed by state or federal rules requiring face coverings for unvaccinated people, wearing a face covering is not required in any of the following situations. However, everyone is urged to move such activities outdoors or avoid them altogether.

- Indoors While Alone or with Members of Your Household. A person does not need to wear a face covering when they are alone or with members of their household in a public building or completely enclosed space such as an office, *and* people who are not part of their household are not likely to be in the same space. If someone who is not part of a person's household enters the enclosed space, everyone must wear a face covering for the duration of the interaction. For clarity, people must wear face coverings whenever they are in semi-enclosed spaces such as cubicles and common areas for shared living settings, such as hotels, shared rentals with multiple households, dormitories, fire stations, lobbies, and elevators. For clarity, persons known to be fully vaccinated and who come into your residence on a regular basis (e.g., caregivers) may be considered members of your household for purposes of this Order.
- Active Eating and Drinking. People may remove their face covering while actively eating or drinking. People are urged to be seated at a table or positioned at a stationary counter or place while eating or drinking.

- Showering, Personal Hygiene, or Sleeping. People may remove their face covering while showering or actively engaging in personal hygiene that requires removal of face covering, including at a gym or other facility. People may remove their face covering while sleeping in indoor public settings, such as at congregate shelters.
- Live or Recorded Performance. Performers at indoor live or recorded settings or events such as concerts, live music, film, television, recording studios, theater, opera, symphony, or other live or recorded activities may remove their face coverings while actively performing or practicing. If they remove their face coverings, performers must maintain at least six feet of distance from attendees and employees and are encouraged to maintain as much distance from other performers as possible. Performers are strongly urged to be fully vaccinated, and to wear their face coverings to the greatest extent possible. Attendees and employees must remain masked while attending or working at the performance except when another exception applies.
- Religious Gatherings. Service leaders of indoor religious gatherings may remove their face coverings while actively performing religious services. If they remove their face coverings, service leaders are encouraged to maintain as much distance from others as possible. Service leaders are strongly urged to be fully vaccinated, and to wear their face coverings to the greatest extent possible. Participants in indoor religious gatherings may remove their face coverings for the limited duration necessary to participate in religious rituals.
- Personal Services. Patrons of personal services such as facials, beard trims, facial piercing and tattoos, and facial massages may remove their face covering only while actively receiving a service or treatment that requires temporary removal of the face covering. Where they cannot maintain at least six feet of distance, providers of personal services are strongly encouraged to wear a N-95 mask, respirator, or procedural/surgical mask while administering the service, as well as to not perform the service unless fully vaccinated.
- Sports. Participants in indoor sports, gyms, and yoga studios may not remove their face coverings except while actively engaged in water-based activities (e.g., swimming, swim lessons, diving, water polo) and other sports where masks create imminent risk to health (e.g., wrestling, judo), or at a time where heat and major exertion creates a safety risk.

What does the Order require of businesses and governmental entities?

All businesses and governmental entities must enforce the face covering requirement in the Order for all personnel and for all customers or members of the public entering their facilities, regardless of vaccination status.

In addition, all businesses and governmental entities must post clearly visible and easy-to-read signage at all entry points for indoor settings to communicate the face covering requirements to all persons entering the facility. [Sample signs are available here.](#)

In addition, those responsible for indoor public settings are strongly encouraged to provide face coverings at no cost to individuals who do not have one upon entry.

What about outdoor use of face coverings?

Although not a legal mandate, the Health Officer recommends use of face coverings, regardless of vaccination status, in crowded outdoor settings.