

INYO COUNTY HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER RECOMMENDATION AND GUIDANCE FOR SOURCE CONTROL OF RESPIRATORY VIRUSES

September 16, 2025

Recommendation: All Health Care Delivery Facilities, to include Health Care Personnel (HCPs) and visitors, are strongly encouraged to wear face masks in Patient Care Areas of the Facilities during the Designated Respiratory Virus Season, Regardless of Vaccination Status

Summary: Regardless of vaccination status, all persons in Patient Care Areas of Health Care Delivery Facilities should wear a high-quality face mask during the period designated by the Health Officer as the Respiratory Virus Season, except for the following:

- a) Young children unable to wear the mask appropriately.
- b) Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents mask use. This includes individuals for whom wearing a mask could obstruct breathing, or those who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a mask without assistance.
- c) Persons who are hearing impaired, or those communicating with someone who is hearing impaired, when the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
- d) Persons for whom wearing a mask would create a risk related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.

Health Care Delivery Facilities should post clear, visible signage at all entry points to Patient Care Areas to communicate these recommendations to all who enter. Facility administrators may adapt the recommendations to the unique circumstances of their setting, as they are most familiar with the factors that may increase risk of exposure and transmission. Administrators and providers play a critical role in identifying situations where healthcare personnel may have contact with patients and in developing procedures that align with this Recommendation.

Masking is recommended as source control, to reduce the release of respiratory droplets and aerosols that carry viruses. High-quality masks also provide additional protection to the wearer. As part of a layered approach to infection prevention, masking should be combined with frequent hand hygiene, ensuring healthcare personnel stay home when ill, and maintaining clean patient care environments. These strategies, when used together, provide the best protection for both healthcare personnel and patients during the Respiratory Virus Season.

Background: The Health Officer issues this Recommendation based on historical data showing higher rates of

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influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), COVID-19, and other viral infections that cause severe respiratory illness in Inyo County annually between late fall and spring. These seasonal surges present particular risks for infants, older adults, and people with impaired immune systems, and may strain the county's healthcare system, limiting its ability to provide care.

Respiratory viruses are transmitted primarily through droplets and aerosols produced when infected individuals speak, cough, or sneeze. Contaminated hands and surfaces can also contribute to transmission, underscoring the importance of hand hygiene in healthcare settings. Importantly, individuals may be contagious up to one day before symptoms begin and for five to seven days after illness onset, which means people can spread infection before they realize they are sick. This makes consistent prevention practices in healthcare environments essential to protecting vulnerable populations.

The intent of this Recommendation is to reduce the risk of respiratory virus transmission in healthcare settings through practical, evidence-based prevention strategies. Masking, hand hygiene, and other layered measures are critical to maintaining safe care environments, preventing outbreaks, and protecting the capacity of the healthcare system during the Respiratory Virus Season.

Definitions:

Respiratory Virus Season refers to the period from November 1 through March 31. It may be extended based on surveillance data, per Inyo County Health Officer.

Healthcare Personnel (HCP) includes all paid and unpaid staff, Emergency Medical Service providers, contractors, students, and volunteers in healthcare settings who have direct patient contact or who work in patient-care areas.

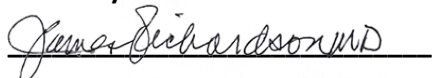
Healthcare Delivery Facility includes hospitals, clinics, laboratories, skilled nursing facilities, home health providers, ambulance services, and other similar care settings.

High-Quality Face Mask refers to, at a minimum, professional-grade surgical masks, with N-95 masks being optional.

Patient Care Area refers to any area that patients regularly access to receive healthcare within a Health Care Delivery Facility including lobbies, waiting rooms, examination rooms, patient wings, elevators, and hallways used by patients. Patient Care Areas do not include administrative offices or staff break areas that are only accessible to personnel of the Health Care Delivery Facility. Patient Care Areas do not include areas such as cafeterias or gift shops that are not used for the provision of healthcare or used to access areas where healthcare services are provided.

Rescission of Prior Health Order. The September 2024 Health Officer Order Requiring Mandatory Influenza Vaccination or Masking of Health Care Workers During Influenza Season was rescinded as of 12:01 am on April 4, 2025.

Issued By:



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09/16/2025

Date

Public Health Officer, Inyo County

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