



# County of Santa Cruz

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## HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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### **ORDER OF THE HEALTH OFFICER REQUIRING USE OF FACE MASKS INDOORS BY ALL PERSONNEL AND VISITORS IN ACUTE CARE FACILITIES, SKILLED NURSING FACILITIES, SURGICAL AND MATERNITY CENTERS, AND INFUSION CENTERS DURING RESPIRATORY VIRUS SEASON**

**Please read this Order carefully. Violation of or failure to comply with this Order is a misdemeanor punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both. (California Health and Safety Code § 120295, et seq.)**

UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF CALIFORNIA HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE SECTION 120175, THE HEALTH OFFICER OF THE COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ ("HEALTH OFFICER") ORDERS:

1. This Order is issued due to the significant rise in influenza (flu), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and COVID-19 cases observed between fall and spring, a pattern that is anticipated to recur annually in Santa Cruz County ("County"). These respiratory viruses can lead to severe respiratory illness among County residents. The seasonal rise in their circulation is particularly dangerous for certain groups—such as infants, older adults, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems—who face a greater likelihood of severe disease and death. This Order is issued to curb the spread of these viruses to vulnerable populations and minimize the risk of severe illness and death.
2. This Order shall become effective at 12:00 am on November 1 of each year and will continue to March 31 of each year as a new seasonal requirement for the facilities subject to this Order unless it is rescinded, superseded, or amended in writing by the Health Officer.
3. All Acute Care Facilities including the Psychiatric Health Facility and Crisis Stabilization Program, maternity and surgery centers, skilled nursing facilities, health care facilities that provide infusion therapy such dialysis and chemotherapy in Santa Cruz County must require all healthcare workers and visitors to wear a well-fitting Face Mask **during the direct provision of patient care or while working in Patient Care Areas or visiting a patient/resident in Patient Care Areas during the Respiratory Virus Season.**

#### 4. Requirement to Wear Face Masks.

- a. Regardless of vaccination status, all personnel and visitors must always wear Face Masks during Respiratory Virus Season when indoors **during the direct provision of patient care or while working in or visiting a patient/resident in Patient Care Areas** except:
  - i. Persons younger than two years old due to the risk of suffocation.
  - ii. Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents wearing a Face Mask. This includes persons with a medical condition for whom wearing a Face Mask could obstruct breathing or who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a Face Mask without assistance.
  - iii. Persons who are hearing impaired, or communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.
  - iv. Persons for whom wearing a Face Mask would create a risk to the person related to their work, as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines.
- b. All facilities subject to this Order must enforce this Face Mask requirement for all personnel and visitors regardless of vaccination status except as otherwise provided in this Order. All facilities subject to this Order must post clearly visible and easy-to-read signage at all entry points to Patient Care Areas to communicate the Face Mask requirements to all persons entering the Patient Care Areas of the facility. In addition, facilities subject to this Order are required to provide Face Masks to individuals who will be in an area where Face Masks are required.
- c. In the event of an outbreak, or if a facility subject to this Order violates or fails to comply with this Order, the Health Officer may take additional action(s), including but not limited to requiring masking of patients to protect the public's health.
- d. **Definitions.** For purposes of this Order, the following definitions apply:
  - i. "Respiratory Virus Season" is defined as November 1 to March 31 of each year. In any given year, the Health Officer may adjust the dates of the Respiratory Virus Season based on respiratory virus surveillance data. If

the Health Officer changes the dates of the Respiratory Virus Season, the Health Officer will notify Facilities subject to this Order through a Health Advisory and a notice posted on the County Health Services Agency Public Health Department's website.

- ii. "Acute Care Facility" means a hospital that provides general acute physical or psychiatric care including the Psychiatric Health Facility and Crisis Stabilization Program.
- iii. "Skilled Nursing Facility" means a healthcare facility that provides 24-hour skilled nursing and supportive care to residents/patients.
- iv. "Face Mask" means a high-quality surgical mask, KN95, KF94 or N95 that is well-fitted to an individual and covers the nose and mouth especially while talking. A Face Mask 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.  
Please refer to CDPH guidance found in [Guidance for Face Coverings as Source Control in Healthcare Settings](#) for more information.
- v. "Personnel" means employees, volunteers, contractors or subcontractors, vendors, and emergency services personnel who work or provide services at the facility subject to this Order, regardless of whether a particular employee, volunteer, contractor, subcontractor, or vendor ordinarily engages in patient/resident care or contact.
- vi. "Patient Care Area" means any area that patients regularly access to receive healthcare within a facility subject to this Order. Patient care areas include lobbies, waiting rooms, examination rooms, patient wings, patient rooms, 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 facility subject to this Order. Patient Care Areas do not include areas such as cafeterias or gift shops that are not used for the provision of healthcare or to access areas where healthcare services are provided.

5. **Getting Vaccinated Is the Best Way to Reduce Risk.** Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 and influenza is the best way to protect the vaccinated person from infection, hospitalization, or death from COVID-19 and influenza, as well as to prevent harm to others by reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and influenza. Therefore, all

eligible persons are strongly urged to be up to date on their COVID-19 and flu vaccinations. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all adults 75 years and older receive the RSV vaccine as well as individuals 60 years and older who are at increased risk for severe RSV. RSV vaccine is also recommended for pregnant people between 32 and 36 weeks of pregnancy.

6. **Applicability.** All Acute Care Facilities including the Psychiatric Health Facility and Crisis Stabilization Program, maternity and surgery centers, skilled nursing facilities, and health care facilities that provide infusion therapy such dialysis and chemotherapy in Santa Cruz County are ordered to comply with the applicable provisions of this Order. For clarity, individuals who do not currently reside in the County must comply with all applicable requirements of the Order when they are in the County. All individuals, businesses, and government agencies operating a facility subject to this Order in the County are required to follow the provisions of this Order. This Order applies to the unincorporated areas of the County as well as the cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and Watsonville.
7. This Order does not restrict the ability of a facility subject to this Order to require Face Masks beyond the requirements of this Order. The Health Officer does not require patients/residents to wear masks, although masks are strongly recommended in this setting. Facilities subject to this Order should prominently display Face Masks for use by visitors as well as supply masks to patients/residents if they desire to wear one.
8. **Obligation to Follow Stricter Order.** Where a conflict exists between this Order and any order issued by the State Public Health Officer, the Governor, or a State agency (such as the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA)) related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the most restrictive provision controls. For clarity, all individuals and entities must comply with the State Order, any mandatory guidance issued by the California Department of Public Health, any mandatory orders of the Governor or a State agency, or any other mandatory provision of State law to the extent it is stricter than any provision of this Order. Consistent with California Health and Safety Code section 131080 and the Health Officer Practice Guide for Communicable Disease Control in California, except if the State Health Officer issues an order expressly directed at this Order and based on a finding that a provision of this Order constitutes a menace to public health, any more restrictive measures in this Order continue to apply and control in this County. In addition, to the extent any federal guidelines are inconsistent with this Order, this Order is controlling.
9. **Enforcement.** Pursuant to Government Code sections 26602 and 41601, and Health and Safety Code section 101029, the Health Officer requests that the Sheriff, all chiefs of police

in the County, and all enforcement officers ensure compliance with and enforce this Order. The violation of any provision of this Order constitutes an imminent threat and menace to public health, constitutes a public nuisance, and is punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both.

10. **Copies.** Copies of this Order shall promptly be: (1) made available at the County offices at 701 Ocean St, Santa Cruz, CA 95060; (2) posted on the County Health Services Public Health Division website ([www.santacruzhealth.org](http://www.santacruzhealth.org)); and (3) provided to any member of the public requesting a copy of this Order.
11. **Severability.** If any provision of this Order or its application to any person or circumstance is held to be invalid, the remainder of the Order, including the application of such part or provision to other persons or circumstances, shall not be affected and shall continue in full force and effect. To this end, the provisions of this Order are severable.

**IT IS SO ORDERED:**



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Lisa B. Hernandez, MD, MPH  
Health Officer of the County of Santa Cruz

Dated: September 18, 2024

Approved as to Form:



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Office of the County Counsel

Dated: September 18, 2024