

Good morning

Given CDC announcement yesterday about masking I felt this merited a special edition. Please see my comments -responses are appreciated

Infectious Diseases Watch Special Edition

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New CDC Mask Guidance February 25, 2022

The CDC announced yesterday it has changed the metrics it uses to assess Covid-19 risk by county across the US. Risk will now be assessed based on three factors: new Covid-19 cases per 100,000 residents in the past seven days; new Covid-19-related hospital admissions; and the percentage of hospital beds occupied by Covid-19 patients. Based on these three factors, counties can calculate whether the risk to their residents is low, medium or high, and only areas of high risk should require everyone to wear a mask. But unvaccinated people should wear masks even in low-risk areas as well as our most vulnerable because of their age, health status or occupation.[see below] Under the CDC's previous criteria, 95 percent of the counties in the United States were considered high risk. Using the new criteria, fewer than 30 percent of Americans are living in areas with a high level of risk. The agency had endorsed universal masking in schools since July, regardless of virus levels in the community, but the new guidelines recommend masking in schools only in counties at high risk. The CDC also said people who are symptomatic, test positive for Covid-19 or are exposed to infected people should still wear a high grade mask face no matter where they are.

What Prevention Steps Should You Take Based on Your COVID-19 Community Level?

Low	Medium	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccinesGet tested if you have symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If you are at high risk for severe illness, talk to your healthcare provider about whether you need to wear a mask and take other precautionsStay up to date with COVID-19 vaccinesGet tested if you have symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wear a mask indoors in publicStay up to date with COVID-19 vaccinesGet tested if you have symptomsAdditional precautions may be needed for people at high risk for severe illness
People may choose to mask at any time. People with symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask.		
If you are immunocompromised, learn more about how to protect yourself .		

Comment and Perspective: Dr. Walensky said just two weeks ago that it was not yet time to lift mask mandates. A lot has changed on two weeks! In general, the new metrics are moving in the right direction. The one metric I have the most trouble with is new cases/100,000. The rise in at-home testing has rendered case-tracking data less accurate because states typically don't capture these test results. Americans are likely performing millions of at-home tests each day which aren't reported back to public-health officials. Some public health experts expressed reservations at the easing of restrictions, noting that the country is still recording roughly 1,900 Covid-related deaths every day, children under 5 are still not eligible to be vaccinated, and significant numbers of Americans remain at high risk because of their age, health status or occupation. The CDC felt it could ease masking recommendations in schools because children are at relatively lower risk of severe disease and mostly have asymptomatic or mild infections, but made no mention of children <5 who are not eligible for vaccination.

In an open letter to elected officials, a group of 400 experts in public health and education [opposed](#) the push to lift indoor mask mandates, saying it was "premature and threatens to place children, their school communities, and their families at greater risk for illness, disability, and death." (see attached) The document says: "Calls to end universal indoor masking in schools should, at minimum, be grounded in good quality data and clear metrics: 1) high rates of vaccine uptake among all eligible children and adults within a school community; 2) low community COVID-19 prevalence; and 3) at least moderate hospital capacity. According to the most recent data available, only 22.6 percent of children ages 5–11 years old are fully vaccinated, which experts confirm is far too low to warrant lifting mandates.

In a prior ID Watch, I outlined my perspective: Is it time to pivot from a shared sense of sacrifice and shift burden based on an individual's own risk? Should we focus on reducing severe disease and hospitalizations rather than infections only. Should masks now be optional and who should consider continuing to wear a mask? I recommended wearing masks based on community transmission, level of vaccination and/or immunity, looking at your own tolerance for contracting SARS-CoV-2 based on your own risk including age, vaccination status, and underlying medical conditions, and if you have been exposed or recently infected. You should also consider risk within your own household and certain high-risk environments such as healthcare settings, public transportation, and crowded poorly ventilated spaces where masking should probably continue at least for now. We should continue to make every effort to make sure we are all up to date with vaccinations and make antivirals and MCA more readily available for high-risk individuals. Lastly, we should be prepared to snap back to more restrictions based on genomic and wastewater surveillance to stay ahead of the curve.