



**ORDER OF THE HEALTH OFFICER OF THE COUNTY OF CONTRA COSTA  
AMENDING PRIOR ORDER MANDATING THE WEARING OF FACE COVERINGS  
IN INDOOR PUBLIC SETTINGS TO ALLOW GROUPS OF FULLY VACCINATED  
PEOPLE TO REMOVE THEIR FACE COVERINGS UNDER SPECIFIED  
CIRCUMSTANCES**

**ORDER NO. HO-COVID19-59**

**DATE OF ORDER: OCTOBER 14, 2021**

**Summary of the Order**

This Order of the Health Officer amends Health Officer Order No. HO-COVID19-51 to allow groups of fully vaccinated people to remove their face coverings in public indoor spaces if there are no more than 100 people present, the employer, host or organizer of the group verifies their vaccination status and other control measures are in place, effective November 1, 2021.

UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF CALIFORNIA HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE SECTIONS 101040 AND 120175, THE HEALTH OFFICER OF THE COUNTY OF CONTRA COSTA ("HEALTH OFFICER") ORDERS:

- 1. Basis of Order.** On August 2, 2021, I issued Health Officer Order No. COVID19-51 ("Prior Order"), which requires all persons to wear face coverings in indoor public settings in Contra Costa County ("County"), with certain exceptions, to prevent the spread of the virus that causes Coronavirus Disease 2019 ("COVID-19"). I amended the Prior Order on August 6, 2021, to exempt persons participating in certain religious activities, and on September 1, 2021, to exempt performers and public speakers in venues where everyone eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine is fully vaccinated.

Since the Prior Order took effect on August 3, 2021, the County has seen a decrease in the rate of COVID-19 transmission in the community. COVID-19 hospitalizations have also decreased. The seven-day rolling average of new cases in the County decreased from 412.3 cases per day on August 3, 2021, to 130.6 cases per day on October 2, 2021. COVID-19 hospitalizations declined from 140 cases on August 3, 2021, to 69 cases on October 10, 2021. The County's vaccination rate continues to increase, and the County remains one of the most highly vaccinated counties in the country.



Based on these developments, and based on my current understanding of the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccination in preventing infection, I have determined that it is safe in these circumstances for groups of fully vaccinated people (but not groups of unvaccinated people who test negative) to be removing their masks within the group, in certain indoor settings in which an employer, host, or organizer has verified that all individuals present are fully vaccinated. While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that masks be worn in public by fully vaccinated individuals in an area of substantial or high transmission, I have determined that it is not necessary to strictly follow the CDC recommendation here because groups of verified fully vaccinated people are at much lower risk of developing symptomatic Covid-19, and likely also at lower risk of transmitting the COVID-19 virus to others, compared with mixed groups of vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.

I have determined that controlled settings where everyone present is vaccinated as defined by this order pose a lower risk of transmission of the COVID-19 virus than many other public settings. This determination is based on studies that show a reduced risk of developing infection with COVID-19 once fully vaccinated as well as studies that suggest a lower likelihood of transmission if a fully vaccinated person develops COVID-19. The combination of reduced infection risk plus reduced transmission risk provides a high level of protection within an environment where everyone present is fully vaccinated. Conversely, screening of unvaccinated individuals through testing alone doesn't necessarily prevent transmission of the COVID-19 virus, as infected individuals who recently tested negative may still be shedding COVID-19 virus due to the reduced sensitivity of some rapid tests for detecting asymptomatic infection and the delay in result reporting with more sensitive nucleic acid tests

Smaller groups are safer than larger groups in terms of COVID-19 virus transmission risk, because the larger the group, the more people a single infected person can potentially infect – and the more challenging it can be to identify close contacts and contact trace those who may have been exposed. Unidentified contacts may go on to spread the virus further without the knowledge that they have been exposed and the opportunity to quarantine. For these reasons, this new exception to the face covering requirement will be limited to indoor settings with fewer than 100 people present.

2. **Amendment.** Health Officer Order No. HO-COVID19-51 is hereby amended by adding subsection h. to Section 4, to read as follows:

h. When in an office, fitness facility, college classroom or employee commuter vehicle, or in an organized gathering in any other indoor setting, under all the following conditions:

- (1) There are no more than 100 persons present, and the group of persons present gathers on a regular basis;



- (2) The employer, host or organizer verifies that all persons present are fully vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine;
- (3) The employer, host or organizer can control access to the space, and the space is not open to the general public;
- (4) The employer, host or organizer maintains a list of the individuals present;
- (5) The employer, host or organizer posts signage prohibiting entry by persons who have a cough, fever or other symptoms that could be consistent with COVID-19; and
- (6) None of the persons present has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, is awaiting results of a COVID-19 test, or had a known exposure to a person infected with the COVID-19 virus within the last 14 days.

3. **Effective Date and Time.** This Order takes effect at 6:00 a.m. on November 1, 2021.

4. **Copies; Contact Information.** Copies of this Order shall promptly be: (1) made available at the Office of the Director of Contra Costa Health Services, 1220 Morello Avenue, Suite 200, Martinez, CA 94553; (2) posted on the Contra Costa Health Services website (<https://www.cchealth.org>); and (3) provided to any member of the public requesting a copy of this Order. Questions or comments regarding this Order may be directed to Contra Costa Health Services at (844) 729-8410.

**IT IS SO ORDERED:**

Dated: October 14, 2021

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Chris Farnitano, M.D.  
Health Officer of the County of Contra Costa

