



San Francisco Department of Public Health

Grant Colfax, MD
Director of Health

City and County of San Francisco
London N. Breed
Mayor

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Contact: Alison Hawkes, Director of Communications, DPH.Press@sfdph.org

*** PRESS RELEASE ***

SAN FRANCISCO ALIGNS WITH STATE TO RECOMMEND BUT NOT REQUIRE MASKS IN SCHOOLS AND CHILD CARE SETTINGS

School systems and childcare sites may choose to be more restrictive than the state and City's guidelines; City prioritizes health equity for highly impacted communities with low barrier vaccinations at schools and distribution of masks.

San Francisco, CA — The San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) announced today that the City will align with the State to remove the requirement that children wear masks in TK-12 schools and early childcare settings beginning March 12. SFDPH strongly recommends that all individuals in schools and childcare continue to wear masks for the time being to keep an added layer of protection and minimize disruptions to in-person learning.

Additionally, the City will also align with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) in strongly recommending but not requiring unvaccinated individuals to wear masks in most indoor public settings. This change to the order will be issued later this week and will be retroactive to March 1. Masks are still required for everyone, vaccinated or unvaccinated, on public transportation, in health care settings, congregate settings like correctional facilities and homeless shelters, and long-term care facilities.

Masks remain an effective tool to prevent COVID-19 infections, and as always **individual entities such as businesses or school systems may choose to be more restrictive than state and local guidelines, including on masking and vaccination.** People can continue to choose to wear masks around others whether it's required or not for added protection and people should respect other's choices around their health.

With the changes in masking guidance, SFDPH continues to recognize the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities hardest hit by the virus and is prioritizing low-barrier access to vaccines and masking supplies. SFDPH also strongly recommends childcare and schools implement a "group tracing approach" to decrease the number of missed school days. Group tracing allows students who are close contacts to others who infected to safely stay in school and test unless they become symptomatic.

"What enables us to align with the state in recommending but not requiring masking in school and childcare settings is the foundational work we have done as a San Francisco community to keep each other safe throughout this pandemic," said Health Officer, Dr. Susan Philip. "We have vaccinated 83% of our



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population, adults and children, and this provides significant protection for even our youngest children who are not yet eligible for vaccinations. Masks are still an important prevention tool for now and in the future, and we may need to rely on masks again if we see new surges in cases or new variants. For now, with case rates continuing to drop, this is a safe step in a direction toward fewer restrictions. We still have work to do to make sure we reach all children with vaccines and provide resources like masks to communities hardest hit, and we will work diligently with our community partners and schools to close the health equity gaps.”

SFDPH will be working closely with the school systems to provide guidance and assistance in the coming days. The City has distributed 150,000 KN95 masks for San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) staff, and a half million surgical masks for SFUSD students. In the coming weeks, SFDPH will also be distributing pediatric KN95 and surgical masks through community partners working in highly impacted neighborhoods.

Redoubling on vaccination efforts, the City and SFUSD has opened drop-in vaccination sites at Bret Harte Elementary School in the Bayview and Rosa Parks Elementary School in Western Addition for eight weeks and is hosting numerous “pop-up” clinics at school sites.

The majority of San Francisco children ages 5 to 11 are fully vaccinated, or 69%. More than 90% of teenagers ages 12 to 17, giving San Francisco children the best defense against the virus. However, last week, [SFDPH released data](#) showing a widening disparity in vaccinations among children ages 5 to 11 by race and ethnicity. Just as during earlier parts of the city-wide vaccination campaign, the leadership of community partners has been critical in identifying the most meaningful interventions for reducing disparities in vaccination rates for adults. SFDPH is also working with community partners to find creative and meaningful ways to reach families in the coming weeks and months.

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