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Masking Not Needed Indoors or in Schools Where Covid Transmission Rate is Low or Moderate, CDC Says in New Guidelines Reflecting Steep Decline in Omicron Infections

Coronavirus / **Published On February 25, 2022 07:03 PM /**

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Federal health authorities on Friday eased Covid-19 masking guidelines, including indoors and in schools, a move reflecting the steep decline in active infections as the risk from the Omicron variant continues its rapid decline across the U.S.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday announced that it has changed how it measures Covid-19 risk, with the new metrics including assessments that considers three risk factors: new Covid-19 cases per 100,000 residents in the past seven days; new Covid-related hospitalizations; and the percentage of hospital beds occupied by Covid-19 patients.

The CDC guidelines say wearing masks indoors isn't necessary where Covid-19 transmission is low. Where transmission is at medium levels, persons with conditions that place them in the high-risk category of severe illness from Covid-19 should seek guidance from their healthcare provider regarding whether to wear a mask. For areas with high levels of Covid-19 transmission, people should continue wearing masks in public settings and in schools.

According to the CDC, a population of 100,000 people will be considered at low risk if the seven-day positivity rate in that population is at or below 10 percent; and if the percentage of staffed inpatient beds occupied by Covid-19 patients is fewer than 200 based on a seven-day average.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands, where the seven-day positivity rate was at 2.38 percent as of Friday and the USVI population is 87,146 according to [the latest Census](#), the territory is well within the low transmission category. There were 108 active cases in all of the U.S. Virgin Islands as of Friday, with 73 on St. Croix, 31 on St. Thomas and 4 on St. John, [according to the V.I. Dept. of Health](#).

See CDC chart below detailing the [new metrics](#):

COVID-19 Community Level

New COVID-19 Cases

Per 100,000 people in
the past 7 days

Indic

Fewer than 200

New COVID-19 adm
population (7-day t

Percent of staffed i
occupied by COVID
average)

200 or more

New COVID-19 adm
population (7-day t

Proportion of staffe
occupied by COVID
average)

Additionally, the CDC only recommends universal school masking in communities where Covid-19 is high. The CDC said its new guidance on school masking is based on data that continue to show children are at low risk of severe disease and mostly exhibit asymptomatic or mild infections, according to Greta Massetti of the CDC's Covid-19 Response (via the Wall Street Journal).

“We need to be able to relax our layered prevention measures when things are looking up,” said CDC Director Rochelle Walensky. “And we need to be able to dial them again... should we have a new variant or surge.”

The V.I. Dept. of Health, which has mostly followed CDC guidelines, may take a different approach to masking when Governor Albert Bryan announces his own easing of restrictions on Monday.

Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion hinted as much to the Consortium Friday evening. “I think it is important for every Virgin Islander and the residents of the Virgin Islands to understand that we are not connected to the contiguous United States, and we have to make sure that we protect our community,” she said. “And whatever decision we make, we’re going to make sure that we do it in the best interest [of the public], to make sure that they’re comfortable — because I know that people are tired of wearing mask at this point in time — but that they are also safe.”

Governor Bryan [has said to the Consortium](#) that guidelines related to masking and the USVI Travel Portal will remain in place for the time being. “We are working on a plan that should have most restrictions except mask [mandate] and [the USVI Travel] Portal gone by March 1,” Mr. Bryan said. “This would include all government employees returning to work and all schools going to full schedule.”