



Monroe County Health Department

Monroe County, Indiana

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UPTICK IN COVID-19 CASES CAUSES RENEWAL OF INDOOR MASK MANDATE

BLOOMINGTON: The Monroe County Health Officer, Dr. Thomas Sharp, and the Health Board issued a health order and regulation that requires all people in Monroe County, vaccinated or not, to wear a face covering while indoors in a public space, with some exceptions. The Monroe County Commissioners approved the regulation during their August 4th meeting and it will go into effect on 8/5/21 at 8:00 a.m.

All businesses and places that are open to the public must post visible and accurate signage at their front entrance indicating that face coverings are required.

Dr. Sharp said that the steady increase of COVID-19 cases and the growing spread of the Delta variant within the region, along with the new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for fully vaccinated people, was the impetus for the health order and regulation.

“We are very concerned about our increased case numbers, which has raised Monroe County from blue to the yellow advisory level on the Indiana Department of Health (IDOH) County Metric Map <https://www.coronavirus.in.gov/>,” says Sharp. “New data from the CDC also shows that the Delta variant is very contagious and is causing most of the new infections in the United States.”

The CDC now recommends that all people wear face coverings when indoors in a public space, vaccinated or not, in areas of substantial or high coronavirus spread, or when at increased risk for serious disease. They reported a recent outbreak showed that fully vaccinated people, if infected, can carry a similar level of virus and spread the infection similarly to those who are unvaccinated.

The CDC is also recommending universal use of face coverings in schools for students, teachers, staff and visitors, along with other layers of prevention.

According to the Indiana Department of Health, those infected with the Delta variant can carry up to 1000 times more virus in their nasal passages than other strains, greatly increasing its transmissibility. For example, the original strain was about as transmissible as the common cold, with an infected person spreading the disease to an average of two people. The Delta variant is considered as contagious as the chicken pox, with infected people able to spread the virus to roughly eight or nine people.

“Getting vaccinated is the best prevention method we have against COVID-19,” says Sharp. “The COVID-19 vaccines are extremely effective in preventing severe illness and hospitalizations. Wearing face coverings while indoors adds another level of protection against the virus.”

Penny Caudill, Monroe County Health Department administrator says they are especially concerned about those not yet vaccinated. She said that while we are doing well to have about 57% of our eligible population vaccinated, that still leaves 43% unprotected and at high risk. She encourages people who need vaccinations to talk with their health care provider and/or visit www.ourshot.in.gov to get a vaccine appointment.

The exemptions to the health order and regulation include the following:

- Children who are age two or younger
- Those who are hearing or speaking impaired where a face covering interferes with communication
- Those unable to wear a face covering for a documented physical, medical or health-related reason.
- While in a health care setting if the provider believes a face covering will impede services
- When alone in a public building, such as an office, in a work space and are able to maintain 6 feet of distance from others, or are making a public presentation and are able to maintain 6 feet of distance from others
- When working in a job where a face covering provides a safety risk as determined by government workplace safety regulations
- When incarcerated
- When seated at an establishment that serves food and/or drink. However, face coverings must be worn when not seated at the table, including entering and exiting
- When doing indoor exercise that is incompatible with a face covering, including swimming
- Emergency situations if you lack the time or means to access a face covering

“Given all of the recent developments, we believe the health regulation is needed in order to best protect our community.” says Sharp.

The order will expire on 9/30/31 unless rescinded earlier or renewed by the Health Board and Commissioners. It is set to automatically rescind if the number of county cases fall below 50 per 100,000 residents and Monroe County returns to the blue advisory level on the IDOH Coronavirus County Metrics map.

For more information, visit the Monroe County Health Department webpage at www.co.monroe.in.us/HealthDepartment.

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