

Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce responds to mask mandate extension

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After Dane County's health department has moved to again extend its mask mandate with a new exception, the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce is raising critical questions.

The extension, announced last week, came after officials at Public Health Madison & Dane County had previously said they had no plans to extend the order. People in the county are now allowed to remove their masks indoors if everyone there is fully vaccinated, unlike under previous orders.

In the order, Public Health Madison & Dane County Health Officer Janel Heinrich notes the county has seen a significant increase in the number of people testing positive for COVID-19 over the past month. The mandate has been extended to Jan. 3.

"We had hoped to not issue any more face covering orders but in the last three weeks, our rate of disease in the community has nearly doubled, the rate among children is at an all-time high and in other parts of the state, cases are even higher," she said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce is questioning the health agency's "arbitrary decisions and timelines" related to the mask mandates.

“We appreciate that Public Health is finally acknowledging that businesses are not – and have not been – a source of significant COVID spread and are incorporating the business community’s feedback in creating this single, common-sense exemption,” the chamber wrote in an email.

But the chamber argues that it’s “unclear what data is being used” by the health department in making decisions related to the mask order and is asking for more clarity about “what targets need to be met” for the order to end. The chamber says it will “advocate to local officials for maintaining an equilibrium among health, the economy and public confidence that is vital to our full recovery.”

See the order: https://publichealthmdc.com/documents/2021-11-23_Order_21.pdf

-By Alex Moe