

PHMDC: Extends face covering order amid continued surge in COVID cases & hospitalizations

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Public Health Madison & Dane County is issuing [Face Covering Emergency Order #7](#), effective at 12:01am on February 1, 2022, immediately after the current order expires. The Dane County Order mirrors the previous order and requires face coverings among people ages two and older when in most enclosed spaces open to the public where other people are present, with certain exceptions. The order will expire after 28 days.

While current rates of COVID-19 infection and hospitalization in Dane County may be starting to decrease, they remain very high. Over the past several weeks, the highly infectious Omicron variant has driven up the 7-day average of people testing positive to 1,258 per day. There are currently 181 hospitalizations and 36 in the ICU with COVID.

“We are certainly still seeing incredibly high rates of illness and hospitalization, however, it does appear that we have reached a plateau in this surge of cases fueled by the Omicron variant,” said Janel Heinrich, Director of Public Health Madison & Dane County. “This does not mean it is the time to let our guard down; we must continue to collectively take as many steps as possible to reduce risk of transmission, including masking.”

Public Health is enlisting every tool possible to help get Dane County through this surge. Through a partnership with Accelerated Clinical Laboratory, the [free testing clinic](#) at the Arena at the [Alliant Energy Center](#) has helped increase the previous

testing capacity in the county by more than 33% in just the past three weeks. The department is also ramping up [mobile vaccination](#) efforts, with hundreds of vaccinations happening weekly at recurring clinics throughout the community in addition to those offered at standing [vaccination clinics](#).

“We are doing everything we can, but we need your help. Please, get a test if you are feeling ill. If you haven’t yet, [get your vaccine](#) and your [booster](#). Upgrade your masks. With your help we will weather this storm together,” said Satya Rhodes-Conway, City of Madison Mayor.

Masks and respirators are effective at reducing transmission of COVID, when [worn consistently](#) and correctly. Some masks and respirators offer [higher levels of protection](#) than others do, and some may be harder to tolerate or wear consistently than others. It is most important to wear a well-fitted mask or respirator correctly that is comfortable for you and that provides good protection.

“With the highly transmissible nature of the Omicron variant, wearing a well-fitted mask is more important now than ever,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “With the help of Public Health, we are distributing 100,000 KN95 face masks to non-profit organizations around Dane County, free of charge, which will then be shared with the community.”

The masks that provide the best protection are high filtration masks, like N95s, KN95s, and KF94s. Here are some things to ensure a mask is working [as effectively](#) as possible:

- Make sure your mask has a tight seal around your face.
- If you have to talk with a mask on, it should stay over your mouth and nose when talking
- Wear a cloth mask over your surgical mask for a tighter fit.
- Consider other fit tools, like mask tape, mask braces, or cord locks.

“Taking these steps is not only the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones, but you are also helping to protect our healthcare resources, which are stretched incredibly thin right now,” said Jerry Halverson, MD, Chair of the Board of Health. “[Data](#) shows us that the more people who get vaccinated, the fewer people who require hospitalization.”

The Order requires face coverings among people ages two and older when in most enclosed spaces open to the public where other people are present. The order does include several exceptions, including if all individuals in an enclosed space are fully-vaccinated. Individuals, who are unconscious, incapacitated, or who have medical conditions or other disabilities that prevent them from wearing a face covering, are exempt.

The Order will be in effect until March 1, 2022 at 12:01 a.m. View [Face Covering Emergency Order #7](#) for additional information.

For more information about COVID-19 in Dane County visit publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus. You can also follow @publichealthmdc on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).