

**For Immediate Release**

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**Washtenaw County Health Department Announces Updates to Local Orders**  
*COVID-19 orders for K12 educational settings lifted effective February 28*

YPSILANTI, Mich., Feb 11, 2022 – Washtenaw County Health Department will lift its remaining COVID-19 health orders in K-12 educational settings effective Feb 28. This includes two orders, one requiring masks, and another for isolation and quarantine. Since these orders were issued, pandemic conditions have changed considerably. Universal masking remains strongly recommended in K-12 educational settings and provides an additional layer of protection, especially when high-quality masks are used consistently in indoor settings. Current orders remain in effect until Feb 28.

Students who test positive or are exposed as close contacts will continue to be excluded from school under the Michigan Public Health Code and existing administrative rules.

The orders were issued in September 2021 and prior to the omicron variant. While they were set to remain in place based on [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#) of "substantial" or "high," conditions have changed enough to warrant rescinding them. Local COVID-19 [vaccination rates](#) among school-age children are the highest in the state. Layering protective strategies remains critical to maintaining in-person learning and protecting health. Masking, which continues to be recommended, is only one of [multiple strategies](#) available.

“Local health orders have been necessary during the pandemic, and these orders have helped protect in-person learning, critical health care capacity, and overall health,” says Jimena Loveluck, MSW, health officer with Washtenaw County Health Department.

“We are in a different place now. We can offer more flexibility while we continue to provide appropriate guidance and work with our local schools to protect health, prevent spread, and maintain in-person learning as safely as possible,” continues Loveluck.

Local cases have declined sharply since peaking in early January. Hospitalizations and deaths have also declined but continue to be reported. Transmission in Washtenaw is still considered high, but local health systems report improved capacity. School-only orders have also become less effective during the omicron surge because school is only a small part of potential or overall community exposures and the variant is significantly more transmissible.

Both the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) recommend universal indoor masking by all students (ages 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Masking indoors and in crowded settings continues to be recommended by the CDC, the MDHHS, and other health authorities and is required on [public transportation](#), including school buses. Washtenaw

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County Health Department continues to strongly recommend wearing a high-quality, well-fitted mask in public indoor settings, including schools.

“Importantly, our local orders remain in full force until the end of the month,” confirms Ruth Kraut, MPH, deputy health officer with Washtenaw County Health Department. “Before the planned changes take place, we will provide updated school guidance. Masks will be required when students or staff have had close contact with someone who has COVID or are returning from COVID isolation. Under [federal orders](#), masks continue to be required on public transportation and school buses.”

Health Department recommendations are supported by scientific data and public health expertise. They should be used to guide decision-making during a pandemic without the need for additional state or local orders. This is the traditional role of public health authorities, which generally do not have the resources to monitor or enforce broad mandates.

At the same time, the COVID-19 virus continues to be unpredictable. Future variants could emerge and cause widespread, serious illness requiring new emergency actions.

### Prevention

Omicron is more easily transmitted and is still circulating at lower levels locally. Everyone should use the effective strategies available to them to prevent and reduce the spread of illness:

- Wear a well-fitting face mask in indoor public spaces. (A multilayer, surgical, KN95, or N95 mask is recommended rather than a cloth mask. A cloth mask is better than no mask.)
- Get vaccinated or boosted [when eligible](https://vaccinefinder.org) (<https://vaccinefinder.org>).
- [Seek testing](#) if feeling ill, or if you have been exposed (if you have been exposed but don't have symptoms, wait 5 days before testing).
- Stay away from others if you are feeling ill, waiting for test results, or have tested positive ([www.washtenaw.org/covid19whattodo](http://www.washtenaw.org/covid19whattodo)).
- Avoid crowded areas or events.
- If seeing others, increase ventilation (meet outside, open windows, increase air flow), limit the number of people, encourage everyone to be up to date on vaccinations, keep at least 6 feet apart, and wear a well-fitting mask (especially if indoors).
- Clean hands frequently.

### COVID-19 Vaccination

Anyone eligible but not yet vaccinated or boosted against COVID should do so as soon as possible. Vaccination is safe, effective, free, and available at [multiple community locations](#). COVID-19 vaccines are preventing people from getting seriously ill, hospitalized, and dying. Everyone 5 years old and older can get vaccinated to protect themselves from the most serious impacts of COVID.

In [Washtenaw County](#), nearly 72% of all residents 5 and up are fully vaccinated. Over 71% of people 65+ have gotten their booster. We are leading the state with our vaccination rate for kids: over 57% of children 5-11 have gotten at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine in Washtenaw.

Appointments for vaccinations are available at the Health Department. If assistance is needed, call us to make an appointment (734-544-6700) or email for help ([health@washtenaw.org](mailto:health@washtenaw.org)).

Local COVID information and updates are always available at [www.washtenaw.org/covid19](http://www.washtenaw.org/covid19). The Health Department also provides frequent social media updates (@wcpublichealth) and sends regular email updates, sign up at <http://bit.ly/WCHD555>.

**Washtenaw County Health Department**

The Washtenaw County Health Department promotes health and works to prevent disease and injury in our community, including responding to health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Our mission is to assure, in partnership with the community, the conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives through prevention and protection programs. Visit us at [washtenaw.org/health](https://washtenaw.org/health) or call 734-544-6700.

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