



Community Questions and Answers:

Collaborative Meeting March 2nd, 2022

Below are questions we received during the Collaborative space held on March 2nd, 2022. We have compiled those questions and answers in this document.

If you have any questions and/or would like to follow up, please feel free to connect with us at Vax.Collaborative@doh.wa.gov.

Q: Is there medical or other scientific reasoning for removing this mandate when cases & hospitalizations are still high, there still isn't a vaccine for young children, and the vaccine isn't as effective for kids?

A: As of 3/8/22, data show disease falling across all age groups, including early learners and school-aged children and youth. The statewide 7-day case rate is just under 100. Hospital admissions are also declining; the 7-day hospitalization rate is under 10. Data can be found on the [COVID-19 Data Dashboard](#). In addition, we have a high level of protection against severe disease from vaccination and very recent prior infections during the omicron wave. As of 3/7/22, 73.4% of Washingtonians 5 and older are fully vaccinated.

Vaccination requirements are in place for staff who work with children such as teachers. Under the Information on Optional Strategies for Layered Prevention section of the [Requirements and Guidance to Mitigate COVID-19 Transmission in K-12 Schools, Child Care, Early Learning, Youth](#)



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[Development, and Day Camp Programs](#) it states “While we are moving into a new phase of the pandemic, COVID-19 remains with us, and it should be recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic response must remain flexible with the possibility for changes that occur at the state and local levels. Conditions may require the implementation of additional mitigation practices to lessen the impact of disease in schools and provider settings, and to ensure continuity of in-person instruction and care.” Please review this section for more information regarding layered prevention optional strategies for schools and childcare.

DOH guidance is informed by statewide data, as well as information from the CDC. See the following science briefs for additional information.

[Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs - Updated | CDC](#)

[Science Brief: Indicators for Monitoring COVID-19 Community Levels and Making Public Health Recommendations | CDC](#)

Q: But isn't one of the reasons for the cases declining due to the mask mandate? Would it be possible that removing the mandate would impact cases?

A: It is true that masks are a prevention strategy regarding transmission of COVID-19 that may play a part in the current decline of cases. Declining cases is one of several contributing factors to the change in masking requirements by Governor Inslee. Other factors include:

- Severity of disease
- Decline in COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths
- Less burden on the health care system from COVID-19
- Continued strong protection against severe disease from vaccination
- High vaccination rate

People may choose to wear masks as it feels appropriate for themselves and those in their community. Layered prevention strategies such as staying up to date on vaccines and wearing masks can help prevent severe illness and reduce the potential for strain on the healthcare system – especially when levels of transmission are high. Local health officials still have the authority to put health orders in place (including mask orders) to control and prevent the spread of disease within their jurisdiction.

We now have many tools in addition to choosing to mask to help protect ourselves and others from COVID-19. Governor Inslee was [quoted in Medium](#), “*Vaccination remains our most essential protection against severe illness and death from COVID-19. It’s also crucial to prevent*



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our hospitals from being overwhelmed again,” Inslee said. “If you’ve been procrastinating, now is the time to get the shot.”

Q: The federal mask mandate on public transit is set to expire on March 18th. Will the state or local counties extend it longer? I see this creating a lot of confusion since the March 18th deadline isn't being communicated.

A: The TSA has extended the security directive for the mask requirement on public transportation until April 18th 2022. Please see the [FTA page](#) for the details and the media statement that includes information on CDC’s next steps. DOH will continue to review the science and data as provided by the CDC as well as Washington State-specific data to inform future recommendations.