

Masks are Back for Washingtonians. Will Other States Follow?

by Aaron Goldstein

On August 18, 2021, Governor Jay Inslee announced the reinstatement of the indoor mask mandate for all Washingtonians. The mask mandate goes into effect on Monday, August 23, 2021. While masking rules had loosened in recent months to exempt vaccinated individuals, the mandate will now apply to all people over the age of five regardless of vaccination status.

The revised mask mandate follows news that Washington State recently broke its previous record for COVID hospitalizations set in December 2020. All 39 counties in the State of Washington currently fall within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) definition of substantial or high rate of transmission, and state health officers unanimously recommended all individuals mask in indoor settings.

The expanded mask mandate will include limited exceptions for office settings not easily accessible to the public *where all people are vaccinated*, and when working alone indoors or in a vehicle with no face-to-face interaction. Small, private indoor gatherings are also exempt from masking requirements, *where all people are vaccinated*.

Washington employers should adjust their masking requirements for employees and patrons to comply with Governor Inslee's proclamation:

1. In work settings easily accessible to the public, all employees should be required to mask.
2. In work settings that are not easily accessible to the public, employees may only remove their masks *where all people are vaccinated*.

Employers in other states where COVID-19 is on the rise should be on the lookout for similar state and local rules.

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