



County of Fresno
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
David Luchini, Director
Dr. Rais Vohra, Interim Health Officer

March 3, 2022

Dear Superintendent Jim Yovino and Fresno County Superintendents,

On February 25, 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released updated information on COVID-19 community levels (a measure of the impact of COVID-19 illness on health and healthcare systems) that indicated Fresno County was an area of substantial transmission where face coverings for K-12 students was recommended.

- [COVID-19 Community Levels | CDC](#)

On February 28, 2022, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) updated its guidance for face coverings in K-12 schools from a requirement to a strong recommendation effective after March 11, 2022, while noting that local health jurisdictions can establish additional requirements.

- [CDPH - Guidance for the Use of Face Coverings](#)

The Fresno County Department of Public Health (FCDPH) is well aware of the CDC guidance and closely tracks cases and hospitalizations. At the same time, the FCDPH has followed the CDPH guidance throughout this pandemic. Both cases and hospitalizations have dropped dramatically in Fresno County since the peak of the Omicron surge, and every indication is that they will continue to decline. Taking another step back, we see that Fresno County as well as our state and nation are finally emerging from the two-year grip of the COVID-19 pandemic. The initial response in March 2020 was to lock down until we understood virus etiology leading to virtual learning in our schools for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic school year, then a return to in-person classes in August 2020 with significant restrictions including physical distancing. The arrival of vaccines offered great hope in the beginning of 2021, but first Delta, and most recently Omicron surges delayed a return to normalcy.

Throughout these long two pandemic years, the FCDPH worked hand in hand with the Fresno County Superintendents of Schools (FCSS), with each individual school district, and with school nurses in Fresno County. Even as the intense discussion around COVID-related requirements swirled and as mask mandates in other sectors were removed, Fresno County schools, families, and students consistently followed public health guidance that has included both mandatory vaccines or testing for staff, and face coverings for students and staff, public health measures that were called for but are unprecedented in our lifetime.

We are now at the tail end of the Omicron surge with no other variants of concern on the horizon. Vaccines have been authorized for over a year and are now readily available for everyone ages 5 years and older. Well-fitted masks such as KN95's that protect both the individual wearing and others have

been distributed through our schools. Accurate, rapid test kits have been sent to homes and these kits are also available in the community.

We are entering a new phase in the battle against the COVID-19 virus. We have not eliminated COVID-19 entirely, but we have the tools to mitigate its impact. The FCDPH believes that it is time to step back from the public health requirements that carried us through the worst of this pandemic. For this reason, the FCDPH will continue to follow CDPH guidance when face coverings in K-12 schools are strongly recommended but not required after March 11, 2022.

It is up to each of us to do our part in combatting COVID-19, not because it is required but because it protects the health and safety of ourselves, our loved ones, and our community. We can all do this by being fully vaccinated and boosted, wearing well-fitted masks when in higher-risk situations including being in crowded indoor settings when others are unmasked or unvaccinated, and staying home if we are sick until we are tested.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rais Vohra MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rais Vohra, M.D.
Fresno County Interim Health Officer

CC: Jim Yovino, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools
David Luchini, Department of Public Health Director