

Dear Parents/Guardians and Community,

The Sonoma County Office of Education has been fielding questions about recent public health orders and other measures being taken to help limit the spread of COVID-19. We want to emphasize that the new health order is a preventative measure, and that we are thankful to our schools and families for everything they continue to do to protect our community from this once-in-a-century pandemic.

The newest health order, which goes into effect at 12:01 a.m. Wednesday, prohibits indoor gatherings of more than 50 people as well as outdoor gatherings of more than 100 when social distancing of six feet per person or cohorts from the same household is not possible. The health order remains in effect until Feb. 11.

Here are some answers to explain what is being done and why:

What activities can continue under the new health order?

Classroom instruction, recess and cafeteria dining can continue using the same COVID precautions that were in effect before the newest health order.

What activities will need to be canceled or modified?

Indoor sports and performing arts events will need to be limited to 50 people, including all participants such as athletes and performers, coaches or instructors, referees, media and spectators. In some situations, this will mean it is necessary to greatly limit or bar spectators. Spectators must follow masking and social distancing requirements. Schools are advised not to hold dances, assemblies or fundraising events until after the order expires. Outdoor sporting events will need to be limited to 100 people if social distancing of six feet between individuals or cohorts from the same household is not possible. If you have questions about whether an event is being held, please contact your child's school or team officials.

Why are these measures being taken?

The new health order, which goes far beyond schools and limits other large events such as concerts, weddings and private events at restaurants, comes as a huge surge in COVID cases threatens to overwhelm local hospitals. Dr. Sundari Mase, the county's health officer, estimates that if no precautionary measures are taken, Sonoma County could face more than 300 hospitalizations a day, overwhelming the capacity of local medical centers at a time the entire Bay Area is seeing a surge in cases.

What other precautions should I take?

The best ways to protect yourself and your child against COVID-19 remain getting vaccinated, getting the booster shot if you are eligible, and wearing N95 or KN95 masks. Parents should avoid sending children to school if they have symptoms of COVID-19, such as fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, aches or headaches, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion, nausea or vomiting or diarrhea. In addition, Dr. Mase recommends all Sonoma County residents stay home as much as possible, limiting trips outside the home to required trips to work or school, or to essential visits to the doctor or grocery store.

What vaccination options are available through my child's school?

SCOE continues to work with county health partners to provide vaccination clinics at schools for students and their families. A current list of clinics can be found at scoe.org/vaccines.

Does SCOE have any more antigen test kits available from the recent state distribution?

SCOE distributed all of the test kits we received to districts by Jan. 6. The test kits went to all public school students in Sonoma County. A small number of independent charter schools did not receive their test kit allocations from districts, but we are working to get kits to those schools.

Are test kits available for private schools?

The California Department of Public Health is facing the same shortage of test kits that everyone is. State officials say they currently do not have tests available for private schools. Kits were provided to public school students because they are considered to be charges of the state.

What is the status of the distribution of masks for schools that the governor recently announced?

SCOE has received a distribution of masks for all public and private school students and staff. A distribution plan will be communicated to school leaders in the coming days. Each school will manage and coordinate mask distribution to all eligible individuals.

Do athletes need to remain masked during competition?

Although the current guidance on mask use contains language about wearing masks "when practicable," the determination of what is practicable is made by county health officials, not individual athletes or team or school representatives. The county health officer has clarified a handful of exceptions to masking requirements for winter sports. Wrestlers do not need to remain masked while competing, as masks can represent a

choking hazard, but coaches and observing teammates must remain masked. Basketball players should be masked during competition, although when they are actively playing – running up and down the basketball court, for example – they can lower their masks so that they may breathe while exerting themselves. They are required to pull their masks up when they come out of the game, huddle up or are seated on the bench. Coaches, other team officials, referees, spectators and media must remain masked.

Why are sports such an area of emphasis?

Sonoma County has seen numerous outbreaks related to high school sporting events, and a number of teams have had to cancel games because of absences related to COVID. If cases are not able to be kept under control, further action could be taken to limit competition.

What is the current guidance for isolation and quarantine periods as they relate to school populations?

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the California Department of Public Health are continuing to revise and review their guidelines for isolation and quarantine. School communities should be following the latest guidance from the state and local health officials, not CDC guidelines. Right now, these measures remain in effect:

Isolation for staff and students (i.e., when a student has been infected with the virus, even if they don't have symptoms): As has always been the case, [CDPH K-12 Schools guidance](#) (in Section 10) recommends that individuals follow the [general CDPH guidance regarding isolation](#). Thus, per the now-updated general CDPH guidance, for "Everyone, regardless of vaccination status, previous infection or lack of symptoms... Isolation can end after day 5 if symptoms are not present or are resolving and a diagnostic specimen collected on day 5 or later tests negative." See the general guidance for more.

Quarantine (when an individual has been exposed to the virus, does not have symptoms and may or may not be infected):: Guidelines differ for staff and for students and vary based on vaccination status.

Individuals with up-to-date vaccine and booster status who do not have symptoms do not need to quarantine but should wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days and test on Day 5 if they are able. If testing positive, follow isolation precautions. If symptoms develop, test and stay home.

For unvaccinated staff or staff whose boosters are not up to date: Stay home for at least five days after your last contact with an infected individual and test on Day 5. Quarantine can end after Day 5 if there are no symptoms and a test conducted on Day 5 or later is negative. If unable to test, quarantine can end after Day 10. Individuals should wear a well-fitting mask around others for 10 days, especially in indoor settings. Such individuals can return to a workplace setting if a negative diagnostic test is obtained within three to five days after last exposure to a case, the employee wears a well-fitting mask around others for a total of 10 days and the employee continues to have no symptoms. If a COVID test is positive, follow the above isolation guidelines.

For unvaccinated students, or students age 18 or older whose boosters are not up to date: If both parties were wearing masks in a school setting when exposed, the exposed student may continue to attend school for in-person instruction if if they:

1. Are asymptomatic;
2. Continue to appropriately mask, as required;
3. Undergo at least twice weekly testing during quarantine; and
4. Continue to quarantine for all extracurricular activities at school, including sports, and activities within the community setting.

For unvaccinated students in close-contact situations where either party was not wearing a mask during the exposure, the students must follow these guidelines:

1. These contacts, if they do not have any symptoms, may discontinue self-quarantine under the following conditions:
 - Quarantine can end after Day 10 from the date of last exposure without testing; OR
 - Quarantine can end after Day 7 if a test specimen (i.e., antigen diagnostic test, PCR/molecular diagnostic test, or pooled PCR/molecular test) is collected on or after Day 5 from the date of last exposure and tests negative.
2. To discontinue quarantine before 14 days following last known exposure, asymptomatic close contacts should:
 - Continue daily self-monitoring for symptoms through Day 14 from last known exposure; AND
 - Follow all recommended non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., wearing a mask when around others, hand washing, avoiding crowds) through Day 14 from last known exposure.

3. If any symptoms develop during this 14-day period, the exposed person must immediately isolate, get tested and contact their healthcare provider with any questions regarding their care.

The [current CDPH K-12 guidance](#) above regarding modified and standard quarantines remains unchanged since November. That said, the state is actively reviewing new CDC guidance (issued Jan 4, 2021) and we hope to provide updates soon.

Staff: As has been the case, employers are subject to the [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards \(ETS\)](#) but [Executive Order N-84-20](#) is still active. It is our understanding that Cal/OSHA will be providing additional clarifications via a forthcoming statement.

Thank you again for all you are doing to help keep our students, schools and community safe,

Steven D. Herrington, Ph.D.

County Superintendent of Schools