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Stanislaus County Public Health Issues Health Order Requiring Use of Face Coverings Indoors to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 and Maintain Healthcare System Capacity

Stanislaus County - Since most restrictions from the State of California's Blueprint for a Safer Economy were lifted on June 15, 2021, the average daily case rate of COVID-19 in Stanislaus County has increased 9-fold and the testing positivity rate has risen 4-fold. The Delta variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is significantly more transmissible than the original virus, has become the predominant strain in the US, in California, and in Stanislaus County. Alarming, hospitalizations from COVID-19 in Stanislaus County have risen quickly from 38 patients as of July 16 to 299 patients on September 1.

This surge in COVID-19 hospitalizations is threatening our local healthcare system. At the same time as this surge in COVID-19 infections is occurring, there is also a high volume of hospitalizations from non-COVID-19 related diseases. COVID-19 hospitalizations combined with the medical needs arising from another historic wildfire season is stressing the capacity of our local hospitals and medical first responders to meet the medical needs of our county.

To stem this rapid increase in COVID-19 transmission and hospitalizations, the best protection for our community against this virus is to continue to increase the number of people vaccinated. The least disruptive and most immediately impactful additional measure to take is the universal use of face coverings, also known as masking, while indoors.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) both recommend that all persons—regardless of vaccination status—wear face coverings indoors when with people outside of their household. With the rapid increase in cases and hospitalizations due to the Delta variant, it has become necessary to elevate the indoor mask recommendation to a requirement.

The order requires all people to wear face coverings when indoors in workplaces and public settings, with limited exemptions, and recommends that businesses make face coverings available to individuals entering their businesses. This order will take effect Saturday, September 4, 2021 at 12:01 am. All people, especially those who are unvaccinated or at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19, should take personal measures to reduce risk in addition to masking.

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This Order requiring all individuals to wear face coverings, as specified below, is necessary to control and reduce the rate of community spread, support our healthcare system, and to reinforce the need for safe interactions. Public Health will continue to assess the situation as it evolves and may modify this Order or issue additional orders related to COVID-19 as changing circumstances dictate.

“The decision to go forward with a masking mandate is based on the need to protect our healthcare system. There is a concerning rise in hospitalizations that is threatening hospital capacity.” said Dr. Julie Vaishampayan, Public Health Officer for Stanislaus County. “Masking is an essential tool that limits the transmission of the Delta variant as we continue to vaccinate the people who live, work, and learn in Stanislaus County.”

“The continued increase in hospitalizations is concerning. Especially, when you look at the non-COVID-19 demands on our hospitals. We need to do something to protect our local hospitals so that we have capacity to take care of everyday medical needs. From what the CDC and the CDPH have learned about masking, it looks like masking is the least disruptive measure to slow the rate of transmission and keep our County moving forward” said Vito Chiesa, Chair of the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors.”

Those who are not vaccinated or only partially vaccinated remain highly vulnerable to the infectious Delta variant. Vaccinations have proven to be effective against the Delta variant and all variants of COVID-19 – slowing the rate of spread and mitigating severe symptoms. All residents 12 and older are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated as soon as possible. For a list of vaccination clinics, visit the Stanislaus County Public Health website (<http://schsa.org/coronavirus/vaccine/>). The Public Health Order can be found at <http://schsa.org/coronavirus/ph-orders-press/>.

Additional information:

- CDC recommendations for vaccinated individuals to wear face coverings in indoor public settings in areas of substantial or high COVID-19 transmission: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>
- CDPH requires face coverings in specific indoor public settings and recommends that individuals wear face coverings in all other indoor public settings, regardless of their vaccination status. (<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/guidance-for-face-coverings.aspx>).

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