

Coulee COVID-19 Collaborative: If You've Got Your Shots, Masks Are Optional for Most Activities

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Media Contacts:

Maggie Smith, masmith@lacrossecounty.org

Adam Hatfield, arhatfie@gundersenhealth.org

Rick Thiesse, thiesse.ricky@mayo.edu

Fully vaccinated people no longer need to wear masks outdoors or in most indoor settings, according to newly updated guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS). The updated recommendation is a positive sign for our community and shows the benefits of the increasing vaccination rate in La Crosse County and nationwide.

As a result of the CDC guidance, the La Crosse County Health Department's Health Advisory #2, which recommended residents wear face coverings in public, enclosed spaces, has ended. We support businesses who continue to require anyone who enters their premises to wear a mask. We encourage everyone to get vaccinated to protect yourself.

The updated guidelines are based on scientific consensus on the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines. Studies have shown that the vaccines are more than 90% effective in real-world settings in preventing mild and severe disease, hospitalization, and death. As a result, individuals who are fully vaccinated can start returning to normal indoor and outdoor activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing.

There are important exceptions to the new guidelines.

Most students in schools are still unvaccinated. For this reason, guidance for K-12 schools remains unchanged. Teachers, school administrators, and staff should continue to follow CDC and DHS school guidance until more people and children are vaccinated. Students and staff on buses should continue to follow all masking and physical distancing guidelines.

Masks should also continue to be used by all people in health care settings, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, and on buses, trains, and planes. Additionally, those who are not yet vaccinated should continue to wear masks and physically distance in public. People with weakened immune systems or those with additional questions should consult their health care provider about whether to discontinue mask wearing and physical distancing.

Fully vaccinated people no longer need to be tested following a known exposure unless they are residents or employees of a correctional or detention facility or a homeless shelter, according to the new CDC guidance. A person is considered fully vaccinated against COVID-19 if it has been two or more weeks since they received the second dose in a two-dose series (such as Pfizer or Moderna), or one dose of a single-dose vaccine (such as Johnson & Johnson).

COVID-19 vaccines are now widely available in La Crosse County and there's broad consensus among medical experts that they are safe and effective. For information on local vaccine clinics, go to vaccines.gov.

