

OHA- ODE 3-2-22 Press Availability

Good Morning, I'm Colt Gill. I serve as the Director of the Oregon Department of Education and Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction.

I'm here this morning with Oregon's State Health Officer and State Epidemiologist, Dr. Dean Sidelinger.

We're here to discuss a new stage of the pandemic and how we can support our students, schools and communities as we enter this stage together.

On Monday, in coordination with the Governors of California and Washington, Governor Brown announced lifting mask requirements for indoor public spaces *and* Oregon's schools at 11:59 PM on March 11.

This change follows the CDC's COVID-19 Community Levels recommendations [announced](#) last Friday. The decision by the Governors of OR, CA and WA shifts masking decisions to the local level beginning March 12 and provides a [CDC framework](#) to help guide local decision making on mask decisions.

Today, Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Education released an update to the RSSL Resiliency Framework which provides guidance for schools operating through the pandemic.

This update is based, in part, on feedback we gathered from local school and public health leaders and communities. It offers a practical approach to safety protocols for quarantine, contact tracing and testing that meet the current conditions of the pandemic.

These guidelines will continue to support schools in reaching our North Star goal of providing in-person learning for every student, all day, every school day *and* includes a focus on supports for students, staff, and families that may be at more risk from COVID-19 than others in the school population.

Key updates include:

- A transition to local decision-making on mask requirements in schools and on school buses with a recommendation to use CDC's COVID-19 Community Levels to inform these local decisions.
- Masking days 6-10 of Isolation for a positive or presumptive COVID-19 case
- On Monday, the CDC updated their guidance regarding case investigation and contact tracing. Universal case investigation and contact tracing are no longer recommended outside of high-risk settings.
 - **Effective March 12, 2022, Oregon will pause contact tracing and quarantine for the general population, including K-12 settings.** The rationale for this decision is two-fold:
 - 1: The decision to pause contact tracing and quarantine acknowledges that these practices now, unlike earlier in the pandemic, have very limited impact on the transmission of COVID-19 in our communities. COVID-19 has evolved to become one of the most transmissible viruses known. By the time an exposure is identified and contact tracing is performed, transmission has already occurred.
 - 2: Following the Omicron surge, and for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic, Oregon will have very high levels of vaccine- and infection-induced immunity. The duration of this immunity is unknown, but is

believed to provide protection from reinfection for at least 90 days.

- In lieu of contact tracing, schools are strongly encouraged to provide cohort notifications when exposures occur. These notifications allow individuals and families to take additional precautions according to their individual needs.
- Because quarantine is no longer required in K-12 settings, regardless of vaccination status, **test to stay will shift from a form of modified quarantine to enhanced exposure testing**. Schools may offer enhanced exposure testing to individuals at increased risk of severe illness, e.g., cohorts which include medically fragile individuals.
- Schools will continue to offer Diagnostic Testing for students and staff. This will allow students to stay in school and provide additional protections to older staff, people who are immunocompromised, people who are unvaccinated, people with disabilities, or others who are at higher risk for serious illness as well as those who live with people at higher risk.
- We will also continue to offer Screening Testing for unvaccinated students and staff.
- When a student tests positive for COVID-19 and/or has symptoms, they should isolate for at least 5 days.
 - Isolation may end after 5 full days if the individual is fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and other symptoms have improved.
 - Individuals should wear a well-fitting mask around others at home and in public for 5 additional days (day 6 through day 10) after the end of the 5-day isolation period.
- Finally, schools should ensure a safe and respectful environment for students and staff to learn together, regardless of individual choices to wear a mask.

This represents significant change in the operations of our schools and the day-to-day experience for the students and staff. This can feel like it is signaling an end to the pandemic. I want to be clear that is not the intention. Over the last two years we have made many shifts from “Stay home, Save lives,” to physical distancing and masking, to a reintroduction of in-person learning. And these moves have saved thousands of lives in Oregon.

Each shift over the last two years has been a response to a new stage of the pandemic and its impacts as well as our experience and learning about the effectiveness of various mitigation efforts.

The shift we are discussing today signals a new stage of the pandemic, one where - for at least the next few months - our state has built immunity.

As we move toward this new stage and begin to witness these changes in how we approach individual and community safety, I hope that we can offer one another grace and patience through the transition.

Some of our family, friends and neighbors are ready for this change and others will have concerns based on their own assessment of risk for themselves or their loved ones.

Members of Tribes, communities of color, individuals who experience disability, and our elders all experienced more illness and death from COVID-19 in Oregon. And we all interact with others who are older, immunocompromised, unvaccinated or otherwise at greater risk from COVID-19.

Oregon is at its best when we come together to support each other. My hope is that we can do that through this shift in protocols, that we can recognize that we each have different health needs related to COVID-19 and that we can honor and

care for one another through this transition to local decision making.

After two years, we have all learned a lot about COVID-19 and many of us have experienced loss.

Now we are transitioning to a reliance on local leaders at the county and school district level to consider the data and develop local protocols to protect all those in their care.

And the responsibility also falls to us as individuals. When we make a decision whether to wear a mask in a certain setting, we have to think about more than our own personal health... we need to think about the health of the others we will come into contact with that day and in the following days.

Our neighbors and loved ones who are at greater risk from COVID-19 are counting on each of us to help keep them safe as well.

We asked for grace and patience as our safety protocols were implemented and people across Oregon responded with empathy and understanding and changed their life habits.

The coming weeks will bring a transition back to *some* of our pre-pandemic habits and even that change will be challenging for many; let's bring that same level of care and compassion to our interactions with one another.

Thank you. I'll turn it over to Dr. Sidelinger.