

OHA- ODE 2-28-22 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 afternoon with Oregon's State Health Officer and State Epidemiologist, Dr. Dean Sidelinger.

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

Rapidly declining COVID-19 hospitalizations along the West Coast indicate mask requirements can safely be lifted earlier than previously announced. The new date reflects improved modeling at the state level in addition to the CDC's new guidance on mask requirements issued last Friday. Because the communities of our three states are linked, lifting mask requirements at the same time will help to ensure a smooth transition for communities and school districts across the West Coast.

This decision shifts masking decisions to the local level beginning March 12 and provides a [CDC framework](#) to help guide local decision making on mask decisions. This timeline offers schools, local public health authorities, businesses, and other organizations time to create and implement local mitigation strategies.

Later this week, Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Education will release an update to the Ready Schools - Safe Learners Resiliency Framework to offer guidance to schools as they take on more and more of the COVID-19 protection strategies at the local level.

This update will be based on the feedback we gathered from local school and public health leaders and communities. It will offer a practical approach to safety protocols for quarantine, contact tracing and testing that meets the current conditions of the pandemic.

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

Some of our family, friends and neighbors are ready for this change. Others will have concerns based on their own assessment of their individual risk. The members of tribes, communities of color, individuals living with disabilities 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.

As we move toward this new stage in the pandemic and these shifts in how we approach individual and community safety, I hope that we can come together as communities and offer one another grace and patience through the next several weeks.

Today also marks the second anniversary of the first COVID-19 case in Oregon, which was discovered at an elementary school in Lake Oswego. I offer my deep appreciation and thanks to the many students, staff and community members who have come together over these two years to keep each other safe and help students learn. Thank you to everyone who has sacrificed to support students and schools during these challenging two years.

Thank you. At this time I'd like to turn it over to Dr. Sidelinger.