

CDC: Vaccinated People Should Resume Wearing Masks Indoors in Some Areas

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Employers may want to reinstitute mask requirements in light of new guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommending that fully vaccinated people wear masks indoors if they are in locations with high COVID-19 transmission rates. The agency's announcement follows a rapid increase in coronavirus cases as the Delta variant continues to spread.

COVID-19 transmission levels vary significantly by geographic location, but 46 percent of U.S. counties have been identified by the CDC as having a "high" level of community transmission and 17 percent have a "substantial" rate of transmission. Employers can view a map (<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>) on the CDC's website with county-specific data.

"We are still largely in a pandemic of the unvaccinated," said CDC Director Rochelle Walensky during a press conference on July 27. But she cautioned that, in rare cases, fully vaccinated people may experience breakthrough infections and could be contagious.

In mid-June, the CDC reported an average (https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailytrendscases) of about 12,000 new COVID-19 cases each day, but the rate recently surpassed 40,000 a day on average.

"An increase in the number of cases will put more strain on health care resources, lead to more hospitalizations and potentially more deaths," according to the CDC. The agency said that vaccines are the best protection against variants.

Melissa Peters, an attorney with Littler in Walnut Creek, Calif., said employers should keep informed about the Delta variant. "Right now, many noncritical infrastructure companies have either recently returned employees to the workplace or are planning on doing so in the fall. If the cases continue to spike, I anticipate we will see many employers delaying their return-to-office plans, especially those in communities with low vaccination rates," she said.

In response to the uptick in coronavirus cases, health care associations are calling on employers to require inoculation, and some jurisdictions, such as California and New York City, have issued mandates (www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/Pages/Medical-Groups-Urge-Employers-to-Require-COVID-19-Vaccination.aspx) for certain workers to get vaccinated or submit to weekly testing.

Visit SHRM's resource hub page on the coronavirus and COVID-19 (www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/pages/communicable-diseases.aspx).

This story is developing and will be updated with more information.

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