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Memo: Gatherings and events COVID FAQ for Humboldt County

Dear Humboldt County gathering and event coordinator,

As we enter the fall season with COVID-19 still very much a part of our lives, many questions arise how to create a safer gathering or event in regard to COVID-19, and whether gatherings and events should continue. This FAQ will be assessed periodically and updated when [community transmission](#) and hospitalizations are at a sustained lower level or new guidance is issued by CDC or CDPH.

- **What is covered in this FAQ under “gatherings and events”?**

Gatherings and events are places where people of different households come together in a private or public space. Small gatherings are usually informal in nature and may occur with family and friends. Large gatherings or events are often planned with large numbers of guests, invitations, or open to the public with or without a ticket. Some gatherings and events, especially larger ones, may include travel and bring people from outside of the area which increases COVID-19 risk.

- **Does the CDC recommend gatherings and events at this time?**

CDC continues to recommend avoiding large events and gatherings. [CDC recommendations](#) in areas of [substantial to high transmission](#) state that organizers are encouraged consider local factors on current COVID-19 conditions and whether to postpone or cancel events. Given current high transmission in our county, Humboldt County Public Health encourages organizers to consider postponing or canceling events at this time. CDC offers [guidance to help prevent the spread of COVID-19](#) should events and gatherings go forward, as well as tools that event planners can use to [assess their level of readiness and planning](#) to safely hold an event. Humboldt County Public Health strongly recommends using as many of the CDC risk reduction measures as possible if a gathering or event is going to occur. These risk reduction measures include masks, physical distancing, enhanced ventilation, modified layouts, hand hygiene, vaccine verification, pre-entry questionnaires, pre-entry testing, signage, and messages to clearly instruct participants to the expectations of the organizer. Virtual gatherings and events are an alternative to in person and do the most to reduce COVID-19 risk.

- **Does everyone need to continue to wear masks indoors and outdoors, regardless of vaccination status?**

In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors in uncrowded areas where it is easy to maintain distance of 6 feet or more from those who are not in your household. However, per [CDC recommendations](#), in areas of [substantial to high transmission](#), people are strongly encouraged to wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not part of your household. Some examples of outdoor crowded spaces might include schoolyards at recess, playgrounds, sporting events, outdoor festivals, or concerts. Currently Humboldt County and Northern California are an area of high transmission. [The Humboldt County health order from August 6th on masking requires masks of everyone, regardless of vaccination status, indoors and in outdoor crowded spaces.](#)

- **At sporting events, are players required to mask when physically exerting themselves?**

Masks should be worn at most times with a few exceptions. A mask should not be worn if it obstructs breathing, in situations of higher intensity activity, like sports, running, or when water is present, and masks may become wet. This is consistent with previous masking guidance from CDPH and CDC. Some people may choose to wear a mask during physical activity if it does not obstruct breathing, especially if activity brings them in close contact with others outside their household. Masks should be allowed in settings of physical activity even if not required.

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- **Will this guidance change once any new CDC recommendations for gatherings are released?**

CDPH and HCPH are closely monitoring anticipated updates from the CDC regarding gatherings and events and will update these recommendations periodically.

- **Do fully vaccinated staff need to wear a mask at gatherings or events in Humboldt?**

The [Humboldt County health order from August 6th](#) on masking requires masks of everyone, regardless of vaccination status, indoors and in outdoor crowded spaces. This [local order](#) supersedes current [Cal OSHA guidance](#) for the workplace that allows fully vaccinated to go without a mask in some workplace settings. Everyone must always mask in all indoor and crowded outdoor settings, regardless of vaccination status, with few exceptions.

- **What about gatherings or events where everyone (staff and all attendees) is fully vaccinated?**

The [Humboldt County health order from August 6th](#) on masking requires masks of everyone, regardless of vaccination status, indoors and in outdoor crowded spaces. This [local order](#) supersedes current [Cal OSHA guidance](#) for the workplace that allows fully vaccinated to go without a mask in some workplace settings. Everyone must always mask in all indoor and crowded outdoor settings, regardless of vaccination status, with few exceptions.

- **Do spectators at outdoor gatherings or events need to wear a mask?**

In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors in uncrowded areas where it is easy to maintain distance of 6 feet or more from those who are not in your household. However, per [CDC recommendations](#), in areas of [substantial to high transmission](#), people are strongly encouraged to wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not part of your household. Some examples of outdoor crowded spaces might include schoolyards at recess, playgrounds, sporting events, outdoor festivals, or concerts. Currently Humboldt County and Northern California are an area of high transmission. The [Humboldt County health order from August 6th on masking](#) requires masks of everyone, regardless of vaccination status, indoors and in outdoor crowded spaces.

- **We have a COVID-19 positive staff in our event, what do we do?**

Follow protocols set by your organization or business for identification and notification of [close contacts](#) as laid out by [Cal OSHA guidance](#). You do not need to call public health to report positive case. All COVID-19 positive lab reports will come to the local health department through the [state reporting system \(CalREDIE\)](#). All COVID-19 positive persons must [isolate](#), and all [close contacts](#) must [quarantine](#), based on [Humboldt County Health Orders](#), even if not contacted by public health officials. If a home test was used that does not report to the state reporting system and documentation of the positive test result is needed, the positive person will need to retest with a method that does report to the state by going to a [local testing site](#), preferably within 24 hours of the home test. If no documentation is needed for your positive home test, isolate for 10 days as instructed by [Humboldt County Health Orders](#) and notify your close contacts that they are to quarantine.

- **Do I need to quarantine/test if I'm fully vaccinated and have close contact?**

Quarantine is not recommended for fully vaccinated persons who are exposed to COVID-19 per [Humboldt County Public Health orders on quarantine](#). CDC recently updated their [guidance for fully vaccinated](#) to recommend testing at day 3-5 from close contact to someone with COVID-19. Regardless of vaccination status, anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate, test, and consult their medical provider.

- **CDC and CDPH allow for reduced 7-day quarantine for everyone who is unvaccinated, not only unvaccinated K-12 students. Why can't other unvaccinated residents in Humboldt reduce quarantine?**

CDC and CDPH have both allowed for more relaxed [quarantine guidance](#) to be adopted by local health departments when the local situations and needs support shorter quarantine duration. Humboldt County Public Health will review adoption of shortened 7-day quarantine with a negative test after day 5 for all residents when local factors support those relaxed standards. For now, all other quarantines will remain 10 days minimum, with 14 days being safest for the community. Allowing for reduced quarantine for unvaccinated K-12 students will keep students in school longer, leading to less disruption in learning.



- **How can we avoid the need to quarantine after exposure at a gathering or event?**

Only those who are unvaccinated and within 6 feet of another person for 15 minutes or more would meet the definition of [close contact](#) and need to quarantine. Wearing a mask reduces the risk but does not eliminate [close contact](#). By structuring gatherings and events with adequate distancing close contact can be avoided for the most part. Using masks and physical distancing will keep participants from exposing each other, and help keep businesses, schools, and events running without need to shut down due to outbreak or large number of quarantined staff. Reduced capacity, physically marking off areas for distancing, creating specific areas for food and drink where masks can be removed while distancing, modifying layouts for entering and exiting events to prevent congregating are all ways to improve COVID-19 safety at an event and reduce the likelihood for close contact. CDC offers [guidance to help prevent the spread of COVID-19](#) should events and gatherings go forward, as well as tools that event planners can use to [assess their level of readiness and planning](#) to safely hold an event.

- **If we have a positive person attend a gathering or event do we need to shut down?**

Only those who were unvaccinated and in [close contact](#) with the positive would need to quarantine. If physical distancing, masking, and other risk reduction steps were maintained, the risk of spread is much lower. If public health determines there is an [outbreak](#), they may require a classroom, a school, an event, or a business to close to prevent further spread in that setting. Some events or businesses may close voluntarily, postpone or cancel events, even when not required by public health based on concern in the local setting. Follow protocols set by your organization or business for identification and notification of [close contacts](#) as laid out by [Cal OHSa guidance](#). You do not need to call public health to report positive case.

- **Should we use home tests for our staff or participants at an event or gathering?**

Home tests can quickly and easily identify someone with COVID-19 and are most useful for smaller gatherings or if someone is not feeling well at home or knows they were exposed. Home tests do not report to the state reporting system, and therefore state and local public health officials will not be notified of these positive results. Results and accuracy of a home test are hard for an event organizer or employer to verify and are not recommended for larger events or workplaces if verification of results is necessary. Home tests may be most appropriate for small gatherings or family get-togethers. The state has made it easy for events, businesses, and organizations to become testing sites for their employees or community: <https://testing.covid19.ca.gov/get-started/>. Training, supplies, and reporting platforms are all available through this program. Local public health can only provide testing supplies to local healthcare providers, we do not supply local events or businesses with rapid or PCR testing that is available through the state program or private vendors.

- **Can someone who is COVID-19 positive attend a gathering or event?**

No, anyone with a positive COVID-19 test must isolate for 10 days from the date of collection of the positive test or the date of onset of symptoms, regardless of vaccination status or type of test used. A negative test later during the 10 days isolation period does not change isolation requirements and repeat testing should only be recommended by a medical professional.

- **I've tested positive for COVID-19, should I test again to end my isolation?**

No. Anyone with a positive test should not test again for 90 days unless they have new symptoms or are instructed to do so by a medical professional. If you are required to test weekly for work/school/team/organization, you will not have to test for those 90 days but should resume weekly testing again after 90 days has passed from the date of your positive test.

- **A medical professional has instructed me to test again. Should I test again?**

Yes. If a medical professional has evaluated the situation and made a recommendation for repeat testing, you should follow the advice of that medical professional. There are very limited circumstances where repeat testing is recommended. Medical professionals who are unsure if someone should retest should consult with public health officials for guidance.



- **I have COVID-19 symptoms, should I attend an event or gathering?**

Anyone with cold and flu symptoms should stay home until the symptoms resolve. A test is recommended if the symptoms are consistent with COVID-19 or a medical professional recommends testing. Please see [CDC recommendations on when to return to school](#).

- **Should my event or gathering use a pre-entry screening questionnaire?**

Pre-entry screening questions are strongly encouraged to reduce the risk in all gatherings and events. Pre-entry screening questions should include questions about recent COVID-19 symptoms, exposure to COVID-19 in the past 14 days, travel in the past 7 days, and any pending COVID-19 test results. Anyone who does not meet all screening questions criteria should be excluded from a gathering or event until enough time has passed from symptoms, exposure, travel unless they qualify for exemptions due to vaccination status or modified quarantine available only to K-12 students. Symptomatic individuals who completed a 10-day isolation period or have a verified negative COVID-19 test with resolving symptoms would not be excluded.

- **What about COVID-19 testing at gatherings and events?**

Gatherings and events can improve COVID-19 safety by using selected testing. The state has made it easy for events, businesses, and organizations to become testing sites for the community: <https://testing.covid19.ca.gov/get-started/>. Training, supplies, and reporting platforms are all available through this program. Local public health can only provide testing supplies to local healthcare providers, we do not supply local events or businesses with rapid or PCR testing that is available through the state program or private vendors.

- **What is Pre-entry Testing?**

Pre-entry testing is testing performed prior to someone entering an event, competition, congregate setting like a school, or other venue or business which can reduce the risk of spreading infection for people who are entering these settings. Proof of a negative test in the past 72 hours or offering rapid testing on site are ways to accomplish pre-entry testing. Symptomatic individuals should not be allowed to enter and would be screened out using pre-entry screening. Symptomatic individuals who completed a 10-day isolation period or have a verified negative COVID-19 test with resolving symptoms would not be excluded.

- **Who should receive Pre-entry Testing?**

*Unvaccinated Individuals*

Individuals should have pre-entry testing performed if they have not been fully vaccinated [1] and will be taking part in activities that put them or others at higher risk for COVID-19 exposure. Pre-entry testing should be considered for those attending large indoor social or mass gatherings (such as large private events, live performance events, sporting events, theme parks, etc.), **competing in high contact sports**, or other events in crowded or poorly-ventilated settings.

*Vaccinated Individuals*

Fully vaccinated individuals do not need to undergo pre-entry COVID-19 testing per CDC recommendations at this time. Events, venues, schools, or businesses could require vaccinated individuals to also undergo testing if they choose, but that is not recommended by public health officials.

- **What is recommended for a **high contact sport**, and should we be testing?**

CDPH ranked sports based on their level of contact in the [CDPH recreational sports guidance](#) applied last winter and spring. Given current COVID-19 case rates in Humboldt County that are higher than they were during those times, we strongly recommend following testing guidelines from that guidance listed under Purple Tier. Any sport listed as low contact sport or Purple Tier sport is not recommended to test at this time. All other sports are strongly recommended to test under the guidance listed as "Play in Less Restrictive Tiers: Outdoor High-Contact Sports." Any sport or event can decide to test to add a layer of safety for their event or organization. CDPH guidance did not recommend testing those under the age of 13 for youth sports. The state has made it easy for schools, businesses, and organizations to become testing sites for the community: <https://testing.covid19.ca.gov/get-started/>. Training, supplies, and reporting platforms are all available through this program.



Local public health can only provide testing supplies to local healthcare providers, we do not supply local events or businesses with rapid or PCR testing that is available through the state program or private vendors.

- **If I'm fully vaccinated and have a positive COVID-19 test, do I need to isolate?**

Everyone who has a positive COVID-19 test must isolate for 10 days from the onset of symptoms or if no symptoms 10 days from date of collection of the positive test, regardless of vaccination status. A negative test later during the 10 days isolation period does not change isolation requirements and repeat testing is not recommended.

- **I had COVID-19 and now I'm required to test for work/school/team/organization?**

Anyone with a positive test should not test again for 90 days unless they have new symptoms or are instructed to do so by a medical professional. If you are required to test weekly for work/school/team/organization, you will not have to test for those 90 days but should resume weekly testing again after 90 days has passed from the date of your positive test. Fully vaccinated individuals should not participate in weekly screening test programs. Home test results are not reported to the state or local public health and therefore are not sufficient proof of a positive test to exempt testing for 90 days.

- **Should individuals who are traveling to our gathering or event have pre-entry (pre-travel) testing?**

Individuals who are not fully vaccinated and must travel should follow pre-entry (pre-travel) testing recommendations in [CDC travel guidance](#) before and after travel.

- **What should we do if we are travelling to an event or gathering?**

The state of [California travel advisory from April 2, 2021](#) is now historical. While no local travel restrictions are in place, CDPH recommends following the [CDC travel recommendations](#) for domestic and international travel, especially around testing pre and post travel. Consider quarantining after travel. CDC has put together [tips for safer travel with unvaccinated children](#). Vaccinated persons should only test when required for travel based on destination. [Unvaccinated travelers are strongly recommended to test and quarantine after travel](#).

- **What is non-essential travel of unvaccinated persons? When can I travel safely without testing/quarantine?**

**Except in connection with essential travel, Californians should avoid non-essential travel unless they are fully vaccinated.** Non-essential travelers who are not fully vaccinated should get tested with a viral test 1-3 days before travel, and get tested 3-5 days upon arrival to their destination ( [CDC travel guidance](#) ). Unvaccinated travelers should stay home and self-quarantine for a full 7 days after travel, even if their test is negative. This includes those who are under the age of 12 who are not yet eligible for vaccination. Non-essential travelers who are not fully vaccinated and don't get tested should stay home and [self-quarantine](#) for 10 days after travel, including those under the age of 12 who are not yet eligible for vaccination.

**"Non-essential travel" includes travel that is considered [tourism or recreational in nature](#).**

"Essential travel" is travel associated with the operation, maintenance, or usage of critical infrastructure or otherwise required or expressly authorized by law (including other applicable state and local public health directives), including work and study, critical infrastructure support, economic services and supply chains, health, immediate medical care, and safety and security. Persons who routinely cross state or country borders for essential travel do not need to quarantine.



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Resources:

Face Coverings:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Face-Coverings-QA.aspx#>  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/guidance-for-face-coverings.aspx>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/outdoor-activities.html>

Gatherings:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/considerations-for-events-gatherings.html>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/gatherings.html>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/outdoor-activities.html>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community/COVID19-events-gatherings-readiness-and-planning-tool.pdf>

Travel:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html> (current)  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/international-travel-during-covid19.html>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-risk.html>  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Travel-Advisory.aspx> (historical)

Testing:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Updated-COVID-19-Testing-Guidance.aspx>  
<https://testing.covid19.ca.gov/get-started/>

Data:

<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>  
<https://humboldtgov.org/2749/Dashboard>

Isolation and Quarantine:

<https://humboldtgov.org/2831/Isolation-and-Quarantine-Orders>

Fully Vaccinated Guidance:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID-19-Public-Health-Recommendations-for-Fully-Vaccinated-People.aspx>

