



MEDIA RELEASE

San Juan County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 14, 2021

The Fast-Moving Situation on Masking

As many are no doubt aware, the CDC has recently [released new guidance on wearing of masks for fully vaccinated individuals](#). That announcement has been followed by the Governor's decision to more or less match the CDC guidance.

Fully vaccinated means two weeks past your final shot.

This guidance was released with no advance warning or coordination with local or state government. It will be a little while before the details are sorted. Here are some key points that we want to highlight:

OUTDOOR (UN)MASKING: The CDC guidance around outdoor masking is reasonable. **Fully vaccinated individuals may go unmasked when outside.** In addition, no one needs to wear a mask in uncrowded areas when walking down the street, on a dock, or through a park – whether they are vaccinated or not. Those unvaccinated should keep their masks on when in crowded outdoor spaces with extended exposure. Farmers' markets, walking off a ferry, parades, or at an outdoor concert are all examples of outdoor places where anyone unvaccinated must mask up. Note that workplace requirements may differ, and as always will be determined by WA Labor & Industries. In addition, any facility or property owner may establish their own rules requiring masks in outdoor settings.

We would also like to specifically highlight that all outdoor activities that involve children are strongly advised to maintain current masking guidelines. Our kids aren't vaccinated, therefore being extra careful around them makes sense.

INDOOR MASKING: The CDC guidance specifically mentions that their approach does not replace any local or state regulations. **The San Juan County Health Officer order requiring customers to mask up inside businesses remains in place.** This applies whether you are vaccinated or not. The reasoning is simple: many island businesses rely on teen-age employees who are only now able to receive their vaccine. Protecting them is vital, especially as we head into Memorial Day weekend. The Health Officer order will be revisited in mid-June once our island teen-agers have had a chance to be fully vaccinated. Note that any unvaccinated children 12 or older should get their shots now. There is no guarantee that there will be opportunities to receive the Pfizer vaccine through local vaccine providers once the currently scheduled clinics are over (go to <https://www.sanjuanco.com/1737/COVID-Vaccine-Info> for details on current 12+ clinics).

SCHOOLS AND MORE: There are some situations where state or federal law will continue to require masks. This includes schools, healthcare facilities, long term care facilities, and public transit (including ferries and airplanes). These state requirements may expand in the days to come.

Some broader thoughts:

-Our highest risk group at this point is children 15 and under – none of whom are fully vaccinated at this time. Those children and their parents need to be extra cautious about exposure to high risk situations (indoors, unmasked, especially with unvaccinated individuals). After 12- to 15-year-olds have been vaccinated, extra caution will still be needed for children 11 and under.

-If you are still making the choice to not be vaccinated or to not vaccinate your children, know that loosening restrictions on masks will increase your risk. Get your shot (go to <https://www.sanjuanco.com/1737/COVID-Vaccine-Info> for info on the next free walk-in clinic on your island). Easy opportunities to get vaccinated in the islands will slowly diminish over the next month.

-As is often the case when national and state politics impact local policy, the job of making sense of it all falls squarely on the shoulders of citizens and local government. Please be patient. This period of transition will pose similar challenges to those we faced a year ago when mask orders were first implemented. Change is almost always hard. Regulations will conflict at times, as will people's levels of comfort with various situations.

We all need to start training our brains to become much more comfortable with seeing and being around unmasked individuals. Tolerance and empathy will be key. And let's not lose sight of the fact that having this discussion is a great sign of progress.

-There are going to be residents, visitors, and business owners who are going to see the CDC guidance, and either out of ignorance or willfulness, disregard local requirements. While every individual and business owner can clearly make their own decisions, we don't think it is a good idea to engage with these folks with anything more than a polite inquiry. This is not the time to pick fights, no matter the side of the discussion.