



Sonoma County
Key Messages: Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)
January 19, 2022

Key Messages are updated weekly, and used for County messaging to the community. Frequently Asked Questions and other relevant information is available at [SoCoEmergency.org](https://www.socounty.ca.gov/soCoEmergency.org).

Vaccine distribution

Milestones: As of today, 959,505 doses have been administered to Sonoma County residents.

Residents fully vaccinated: 368,001 - equal to 78.2 percent of the county's eligible population.

Residents partially vaccinated: 37,913 - equal to 8.1 percent of the county's eligible population

All residents 5 and older are now eligible for vaccination against COVID-19. As the Omicron variant spreads, our focus is on booster shots, testing and encouraging everyone to wear a high-quality mask. First and second doses are still vital, but we need to increase our rate of boosters administered because of the protection they offer against the worst outcomes of COVID — severe illness, hospitalization and death. Breakthrough cases in vaccinated people tend to be mild or asymptomatic; unvaccinated people are at far greater risk. People who are unvaccinated here are two times more likely to be infected with the virus, but they are 17 times more likely to be hospitalized if they get COVID and they are 13.7 times more likely to die from COVID. More than 187,000 residents have received a booster shot.

Children ages 5 to 17 can only receive the Pfizer vaccine. To date, 41.5 percent of children ages 5 to 11 in the county now are partially or fully vaccinated -- 15,400, more than 9,700 of whom are fully vaccinated. Children ages 12 and older are now eligible for a booster shot of the Pfizer vaccine. Regulators also shortened by a month the amount of time that adults and adolescents should wait between second and third doses, allowing them to seek booster shots five months after second injections.

Nearly 406,000 residents have received at least one dose -- 82.1 percent percent of the county's total population. That means 86 percent of our eligible 5 and older population is now fully or partially vaccinated. By comparison, 72.3 percent of the eligible California population is fully

vaccinated with 8.8 percent partially vaccinated. Nationally, 79.9 percent of the eligible population is fully or partially vaccinated.

The county urges anyone who tests positive using an at-home antigen test to report the result by calling the county's COVID hotline at 707-565-4667.

The County's vaccine clinics page is continually updated. The pop-up calendar shows what clinics are operating each day. Use the county's testing page to find a site and book an appointment. High demand for testing means walk-ins are not being taken at most sites. Demand is making it difficult to get tested at a site or to obtain at-home tests. Officials recognize how frustrating this can be, especially for parents as children return to school, and urge patience. The county is working to increase testing, and the state and federal governments hope to supply more at-home tests soon. Every household can now order four free tests online from the federal government.

Current Sonoma County metrics:

- Our rate of new daily cases per 100,000 population is 222.6.
- Our case rate for unvaccinated individuals is 480 per 100,000 compared with 172 for vaccinated residents.
- Our overall testing positivity rate is 20.9 percent.
- Our equity metric testing positivity rate is 25.6 percent.

Update on local case rates and hospitalizations

Local case rates and COVID-related hospitalizations have hit levels not seen during the two years of the pandemic. A month ago, we were averaging 95 new cases a day (19 per 100,000 residents). Now we are averaging about 1,200 new cases per day. Local hospitals and health care providers, along with many other businesses, are dealing with critical staffing issues because so many workers are testing positive or having to stay home to care for children who tested positive. COVID-related hospitalizations jumped from 28 on Jan. 3 to 105 today. Eighteen of those patients were in ICU beds, up from four on Jan. 3. Sonoma County currently has the fifth lowest hospital capacity of California's 58 counties, according to the New York Times. Over the past two weeks, Sonoma County had the third highest percentage increase in hospitalizations among the 58 counties. The unvaccinated still account for most hospitalizations here, especially those in our intensive care units. Deaths are starting to tick up here, especially among the elderly. Omicron is incredibly contagious and is easily transmitted during gatherings, especially large ones. Up to 50 percent of the recent cases in the county with a known source of transmission have been due to gatherings, with nearly all

of these being gatherings involving more than 12 people. This public health evidence along with our local hospitals being at risk of being overwhelmed prompted two recent mitigation steps by the county's health officer, Dr. Sundari Mase.

Dr. Mase on Jan. 10 appealed to residents to stay home as much as possible for the next 30 days and limit interactions with those outside of their immediate household. Dr. Mase recommends that people limit travel outside the home to just going to work or to school and making only necessary trips such as going to the grocery store or the doctor.

She also issued a Health Order canceling large gatherings to prevent the further spread of coronavirus in the county. Large gatherings of more than 50 people indoors, or more than 100 people outdoors (where social distancing is not feasible), are prohibited for the duration of the order. The order is scheduled to remain in effect until Feb. 11. This order will reduce the likelihood that many individuals will be exposed to COVID-19 at a single event, and will help slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

Dr. Mase and other local health officials, including top hospital leaders, appeared at a public hearing held by the county Board of Supervisors today. Dr. Mase said Sonoma County is experiencing an unusually high amount of community spread and COVID-related hospitalizations, requiring immediate steps be taken to protect the community, preserve our hospital capacity and promote equity. Emergency departments are already overwhelmed in the county, with long patient wait times, she said.

She said that the health order limiting gatherings was the most strategic and immediate action the county could take at this time to address the critical strain on our hospital and health care capacity. County health is seeing multiple outbreaks from gatherings, including among the vaccinated.

Vaccination, including booster shots, is another key mitigation strategy. Although growing evidence shows the Omicron variant often results in milder illness, especially among those who are vaccinated and boosted, local hospitals could still be overwhelmed during this surge due to the sheer volume of cases that are anticipated. Omicron is dangerous, as demonstrated by our increasing hospitalizations and deaths. COVID patients also need to be isolated in the hospital to prevent spread, creating more capacity challenges.

Dr. Mase said these mitigation measures are needed to protect our most vulnerable populations in addition to our hospitals. Since Jan. 1, there have been 348 cases in our 36 senior residential care facilities, despite high vaccination rates. Residents 65 and older have accounted for 40 percent of all deaths in the pandemic. There have been 10 COVID deaths of those 65 and older since December, with more expected to be reported soon.

In addition to the impact on seniors and those with underlying health conditions, county health officials also are concerned that the surge will continue to disproportionately impact low-income communities of color.

These communities face the highest risks of becoming infected with COVID-19 because of their disproportionate representation in the essential workforce, lack of sick leave/job protections, multigenerational households, use of shared transportation and other factors. Latinx residents are experiencing the highest rate of cases with 272 new cases per 100,000 residents. Latinx residents have accounted for more than half (53 percent) of all cases in the county despite making up 27.3 percent of the population. They also have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths, including reduced life expectancy.

Update on situation in local schools

The Sonoma County Office of Education and county public health held a joint webinar Tuesday evening on pediatric vaccines and COVID cases in our local schools. Prior to the Omicron surge, there had been 1,231 student cases reported in the county since classes started in August 2021. Public health nurses estimate receiving reports of more than 2,000 cases among school children in the past week alone. This figure is nearly double the amount of student cases that occurred over the entire school year in just seven days. Unvaccinated children ages 5 to 17 are being infected at five times the rate of fully vaccinated children. School age children account for 20 percent of new cases in the county, more than any other age group right now. On Tuesday night, local doctors and public health officials stressed the safety of vaccines and the importance of parents getting their eligible children vaccinated as soon as possible.

A live Spanish-language version of the webinar will be streamed at 5 p.m. today on the county's [Facebook page](#). Both webinars will be made available for viewing on the county's [YouTube channel](#). Tuesday's webinar can also be [watched on Facebook](#).

Health and education officials are doing everything possible to keep local schools open.

- The pediatric vaccination campaign is on track to reach its goal of vaccinating 50 percent of eligible children by Jan. 31.
- The county office of education in early January distributed 67,000 antigen rapid test kits to the families of students.
- 250,000 N95 masks were provided by the office of education to local schools to distribute to students and staff.
- Vaccinated students who are asymptomatic do not need to quarantine.
- Four schools in the county have had to close for one day recently because of a high number of cases.

- Large vaccination and booster clinics will be held on Jan. 29 and 30 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds in Santa Rosa.
- Distance learning is not an option under state rules this school year.

Other developments and trends

- There have now been 429 reported COVID-19 deaths in Sonoma County. Most of the deaths have been unvaccinated residents or vaccinated residents who are elderly and had other medical conditions that made them more vulnerable.
- Deaths typically lag hospitalizations by a month or more.
- New daily U.S. cases are averaging 756,000, up 38 percent in two weeks, according to a New York Times [database](#). Daily U.S. COVID deaths have increased 43 percent in the past two weeks to 1,889 a day. The United States has recorded 853,000 COVID-19 deaths.
- Reported COVID-19 cases among children have spiked dramatically across the United States. For the week ending Jan. 13, 981,000 child COVID-19 cases were reported. That is a 69 percent increase over the 580,000 added cases reported the week ending Jan. 6 and a tripling of case counts from the two weeks prior. Nearly 9.5 million children have tested positive, according to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

Americans can request four free rapid tests online

Americans can request four free rapid tests from the federal government. The tests will take seven to 12 days to arrive. The website to process the requests, covidtests.gov, is up and taking orders. President Biden said in December that his administration would purchase 500 million rapid at-home tests and distribute them free to Americans. On Thursday, he announced plans to buy 500 million more tests, bringing the total to one billion.

- Each household will be limited to four free tests.
- The Postal Service will handle shipping and delivery through first-class mail.
- Free tests will also be available at some community health centers, rural clinics and federal testing sites.

U.S. to provide 400 million N95 masks to residents

The Biden administration will begin making 400 million [N95 masks](#) available for free to U.S. residents starting next week. The White House announced today that the masks will come from the government's Strategic National

Stockpile, which has more than 750 million of the highly protective masks on hand. The move, which officials are calling the “largest deployment of personal protective equipment in U.S. history,” comes just days after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated its mask guidance to acknowledge that cloth masks do not offer as much protection as surgical masks or respirators.

- N95 respirators, so named because they can filter out 95 percent of all airborne particles when used correctly, were in short supply early in the pandemic. According to the CDC’s new description of masks, well-fitting respirators, including N95s, offer the highest level of protection.
- The masks will be available for pickup at pharmacies and community health centers across the country. They will begin shipping this week for distribution starting late next week, the White House said.
- Dr. Mase also appealed for residents to upgrade the quality of face coverings to a surgical mask or a KN95, KF94 or N95 mask. “Those traditional cloth masks that many of us have been wearing are just not as effective in stopping the spread of this form of the virus.” Her advice mirrors new state guidance on the best masks.

The CDC on Friday clarified its stance on various kinds of masks, acknowledging that the cloth masks frequently worn by Americans do not offer as much protection as surgical masks or respirators. Early in the pandemic, high-quality medical and respirator-style masks were in short supply. Now the problem is there are so many different masks for sale, it’s tough to know which ones have been tested and certified by government agencies, and which are counterfeit. There are numerous counterfeit masks on the market. The CDC offers advice on how to tell if a N-95 mask is a fake.

What to consider when choosing a mask for kids

Masks are a great way to reduce COVID-19 in schools. Masks help stop the virus from getting into the air if the person wearing it is infected. Masks also help protect people from breathing in the virus from the air.

California has released tips and resources for choosing the best mask for children. KF94s and KN95s are both available in kid's sizes with good fit and good filtration. N95s also provide excellent fit and filtration but will not fit smaller faces. Kid-sized medical masks provide good filtration, but do not provide a tight fit. Fabric masks can help reduce the spread of COVID-19, but many have both poor fit and filtration.

Read more: Masks for Kids: Tips and Resources.

What to know and do if you contract COVID

With many people testing positive these days, and with evolving federal recommendations, there is some confusion about what to do. If you test positive for COVID, the first thing you should do is isolate yourself for at least five days to protect your health and avoid infecting others.

- While isolating, stay in a separate room from those not infected. Use a separate bathroom if you can. Wear a good mask around others, even at home, and ask others in your home to do the same. Open the windows, when possible. If your residence has an HVAC system, make sure it has a fresh filter.
- Get a test on day five, and if it is negative you can end your isolation.
- The California Department of Public Health recommends a rapid antigen test, not a PCR test, to determine if you can exit isolation.
- If you can't get tested, you can end your isolation after 10 days if you don't have symptoms.
- If you used an at-home test, you should report the results to the county health department at 707-565-4667.
- Notify close contacts that they've been exposed. A close contact is someone who spent at least 15 minutes over a 24-hour period within 6 feet of a person who tested positive for COVID.
- People who are fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine after contact with someone who had COVID-19 unless they have symptoms. However, fully vaccinated people should get tested five to seven days after their exposure, even if they don't have symptoms, and wear a mask indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until their test result is negative.
- Unvaccinated people should stay home for 14 days after your last contact with a person who has COVID-19. If you have symptoms, immediately self-isolate and contact your health care provider.

Seek medical care if you display the following symptoms:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- Confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds (or an abnormally low reading on a pulse oximeter, if you have one).

CDC shortens isolation and quarantine periods: What that means

The CDC on Dec. 27 shortened by half the isolation period for people who contract the coronavirus, saying that those without symptoms could safely resume mixing with others just five days after their positive test results. CDC officials said the guidance is in keeping with growing evidence that

people with the coronavirus are most infectious in the two days before and three days after symptoms develop. The guidance is not a mandate; it's a recommendation to employers and state and local officials. The isolation rules are for people who are infected. They are the same for people who are unvaccinated, partly vaccinated, fully vaccinated or boosted. The CDC issued an explanation of the difference between what it means to isolate and quarantine and why it recently recommended shorter periods for both. The update includes what to do in specific settings and circumstances. The California Department of Public Health has updated its guidance to align with the recommended isolation and quarantine time frames from the CDC. In this time of uncertainty due to Omicron, California added additional testing recommendations to exit isolation and quarantine and improved masking measures to protect the health of all Californians. The state recommends a negative test before ending isolation after five days.

State allows asymptomatic health personnel to keep working

Gov. Gavin Newsom on Jan. 10 announced health care workers who test positive for COVID but are vaccinated and asymptomatic can still show up for work. According to the California Department of Public Health, this is not a requirement but gives hospitals flexibility in case of staffing shortages. The state has aligned with the CDC's shortened duration of isolation and testing considerations for health care workers who test positive for COVID-19. The state's new guidance means that until Feb. 1, health care personnel who test positive for COVID-19 and are asymptomatic may return to work immediately without isolation and without testing. Health care personnel who have been exposed and are asymptomatic may return to work immediately without quarantine and without testing. These health care workers must wear an N95 respirator.

Large California study finds Omicron cuts hospital risk in half

A study of nearly 70,000 COVID patients in California found that Omicron causes less severe disease than other variants. The research, posted online on Jan. 11, aligns with similar findings from South Africa, Britain and Denmark. Compared with Delta, Omicron infections were half as likely to send people to the hospital. And the people who came to the hospital with Omicron stayed for a shorter period. The variant cut hospital stays by more than three days, a reduction of 70 percent compared with Delta.

Out of more than 52,000 Omicron patients identified from electronic medical records of Kaiser Permanente of Southern California, Dr. Joseph Lewnard and his colleagues found that not a single patient went on a ventilator during that time. "It's truly a viral factor that accounts for reduced severity," said

Lewnard, an epidemiologist at UC Berkeley, and an author of the study, which has not yet been published in a scientific journal.

The researchers analyzed 69,279 symptomatic patients who tested positive for the coronavirus between Nov. 30 and Jan. 1. Three-quarters of the positive samples contained the Omicron variant; the rest were Delta. The researchers then followed the people who tested positive to see if they ended up in the hospital. They excluded the so-called incidental COVID patients who showed up at hospitals for other complaints and only tested positive for the coronavirus once they arrived. Fourteen of the Delta-infected patients died, while only one Omicron patient did. That difference translated into a 91 percent reduction in the risk of death.

Omicron updates

The CDC estimates that the Omicron variant now accounts for 99.5 percent of COVID cases in the United States. The World Health Organization on Nov. 26 deemed Omicron a "variant of concern" after it was first identified in Botswana and South Africa.

- Booster doses of both the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines are likely to offer a substantial increase in protection against Omicron.
- All vaccines still seem to provide a significant degree of protection against serious illness from Omicron, which is the most crucial goal. But only the Pfizer and Moderna shots, when reinforced by a booster, appear to have initial success at stopping infections.
- Studies on animals suggest that Omicron readily infects cells in the upper airway, but works poorly in the lungs, which could explain its milder effects.

U.S. insurers must cover 8 at-home COVID tests per month

Private insurers will have to cover the cost of eight at-home tests per member per month, the Biden administration said. People who provide their insurance information will be able to get the tests with no out-of-pocket costs at certain pharmacies; in other cases, they will have to file claims to their insurers for reimbursement. Roughly 150 million Americans, or about 45 percent of the population, are privately insured. The new U.S. policy does not apply to at-home tests that Americans purchased before Jan. 15, 2022.

The at-home tests are typically sold in packs of two, and prices have ranged in cost from \$14 to \$34. Tests ordered or administered by a health provider would continue to be covered by insurance without copayment or a deductible. Check out these FAQs for more information.

White House promises millions of free COVID tests to schools

The White House said on Jan. 12 that it would distribute millions of free coronavirus tests to schools to try to keep classrooms open.

- Five million rapid antigen tests will be made available to K-12 schools across the country each month. States will have to apply for them. Once such requests are made, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will work to deliver the first shipments as early as this month.
- The White House also promised to make lab capacity available for five million free polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, tests, facilitated through three federally-funded regional providers each month. The providers will offer testing materials, supplies, lab results and reporting at no direct cost to schools, which will have access to the services immediately.

Study: Popular at-home test detects most infectious Omicron cases

Abbott BinaxNOW, a popular at-home test, can detect the vast majority of people who are infected with the Omicron variant and are carrying high levels of the virus, according to a study of more than 700 people who visited a walk-up testing site in San Francisco. BinaxNOW is a rapid antigen test, which is designed to detect proteins on the outside of the coronavirus. Like all rapid antigen tests, it is less sensitive than PCR tests, which can find even very small traces of the virus. Rapid antigen tests have generally been good at catching people who have high viral loads and are most likely to be infectious.

- The study found that overall, the BinaxNOW detected 65 percent of the infections identified via PCR testing, but 95 percent of people who had the highest viral loads.
- Among those who had high levels of the virus, the tests caught 98 percent of those with symptoms and 90 percent of those without symptoms, researchers found.

"It's working as it was designed," said Joseph DeRisi, a biochemist at UC San Francisco, co-president of the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub and an author of the paper. "There does not seem to be any performance deficit with Omicron."

Booster update: Pfizer booster authorized for 12- to 15-year-olds

The CDC on Jan. 7 authorized boosters of the Pfizer vaccine for 12- to 15-year-olds. Americans who received two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines also can now seek a booster shot five months after the second shot, and not wait six months, as earlier guidance had said. The agency also recommended that some immunocompromised children ages 5 to 11 receive an additional primary vaccine shot 28 days after the second shot, matching

the guidance for similar people 12 and older. Pfizer's vaccine is the only one authorized for pediatric use in the United States.

- 16- and 17-year-olds became eligible for Pfizer booster shots on Dec. 9. Sonoma County and other county public health agencies across the Bay Area on Dec. 17 urged everyone eligible to get vaccinated and, if eligible, get a booster right away to protect against the Omicron variant.
- Those 18 and older can use any COVID-19 vaccine approved by the federal government.
- Anyone 18 or older can choose either a Pfizer or Moderna booster five months after their last dose. For anyone who got the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the wait already was just two months.
- People can mix-and-match boosters from any company.

Other key information regarding booster shots:

- 187,489 boosters have been administered in Sonoma County since they were authorized for the first groups in September.
- 56.4 percent of eligible residents 12 and older have received a booster.
- 67,493 boosters have gone to those ages 65 and older.
- 4,381 boosters have been administered to children ages 12 to 17.
- The CDC reports that 81 million fully vaccinated people have received an additional vaccine dose in the United States.
- The Moderna booster is half the size of the primary dose administered.

Some at-risk Americans to be eligible for a 4th dose

Some people with a weakened immune system can get a fourth dose of the coronavirus vaccine, according to recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that were updated on Jan. 7. The CDC endorsed a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines for moderately or severely immunocompromised people on Aug. 13, but said this would be considered a part of the primary immunization, not a booster shot. In October, the agency said those immunocompromised people could receive a booster shot — a fourth dose of vaccine, six months after their third dose. These guidelines were consistent with its recommendation for other adults. The CDC recently shortened that interval to five months for a booster shot for Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna recipients.

The CDC estimates there are seven million immunocompromised individuals in the country. Many of them produce few to no antibodies in response to a vaccine or an infection. When they do become infected, they may suffer prolonged illness, with death rates as high as 55 percent.

County urges employers to require proof of booster

Employers should immediately require all workers to get a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, if eligible for one, or get tested at least twice weekly for COVID under new guidelines issued Dec. 28 by Dr. Sundari Mase, Sonoma County health officer. The guidelines are voluntary but strongly recommended to help mitigate a surge in cases and protect the health of workers, their families and vulnerable community members.

In addition to twice-weekly testing, employers should consider requiring unvaccinated and unboosted employees, if eligible for a booster, to wear an FDA-cleared surgical mask or respirator in indoor work settings.

Dr. Mase issued two health orders last month requiring booster shots or twice-weekly testing for local school employees and for personnel working in fire, law enforcement, emergency medical services, pharmacies, dental offices and temporary disaster shelters in Sonoma County. The mandatory orders take effect Feb. 1, although Public Health highly recommends that employers covered by the orders immediately begin testing unvaccinated and unboosted employees at least twice weekly.

All County of Sonoma employees will be required to provide proof of booster (when eligible) against COVID-19 or undergo twice-weekly COVID-19 testing. The policy change is effective Feb. 1. The county, with more than 4,000 employees, is the region's largest employer.

The health orders and guidance are on the county's [health orders page](#).

Update on Sonoma County's pediatric vaccine campaign

More than 41 percent of the county's eligible children ages 5 to 11 have received at least one dose since the vaccine became available in early November. Twenty-six percent of those children are now fully vaccinated. Parents are encouraged to reach out to their pediatrician or a local pharmacy to find a vaccine for their children now that the CDC has endorsed the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children ages 5 to 11. Pharmacy appointments can be made through [Myturn.ca.gov](https://myturn.ca.gov). Dozens of vaccination clinics have been held at designated schools throughout the county to serve people who do not have convenient or affordable access to healthcare providers. A list of school-based clinics is on the Sonoma County Office of Education website along with information for parents. Doses for those 12 and older will be available.

- The county's pediatric vaccine campaign is planned with a focus on equity. The sites for school-based clinics are in areas with high case rates, a high number of English learners, and with lower vaccination rates. Those doses are intended for those school populations but no one will be turned away who is eligible for a vaccine.

- All doses will be available at no cost to children or their parents.
- Parents are asked to bring a photo ID with date of birth as well as medical and prescription insurance card (if insured). Nobody will be turned away for lack of ID.
- Consent forms will be required if a child is not with a parent or guardian; consent forms are available in English and Spanish.
- The campaign seeks to vaccinate half the eligible children ages 5 to 11 by Jan. 31, and 70 percent by Feb. 28.
- The CDC on Nov. 2 endorsed the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children ages 5 to 11. Children receive one-third of the dose authorized for those 12 and older, delivered by smaller needles and stored in smaller vials. A second dose will be necessary, three weeks after the first.
- The FDA authorized the Pfizer vaccine for 12- to 15-year-olds in May.
- Dr. Brian Prystowsky, a local Sutter Health pediatrician, explains the benefits of the pediatric vaccine in this video.
- Vaccine testimonials by doctors, students and local parents are also available on the Sonoma County Office of Education website.

Sonoma County rescinds face mask exemption

Sonoma County on Dec. 29 joined four other Bay Area counties in rescinding exemptions to local public health orders that allowed stable groups of fully vaccinated people to remove their masks indoors in some workplaces, gyms, churches and other public settings. Everyone, regardless of vaccination status, must wear a mask in all indoor public settings, effective Dec. 30. Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin and San Francisco counties and the city of Berkeley removed similar exemptions in a coordinated effort to blunt a regional surge in COVID-19 cases. Sonoma County has required facial coverings in most indoor public settings since August.

Local vaccination strategy and availability

The County and its health partners are collaborating to make vaccines available where and when it is most convenient and where they are most needed. The county's vaccination calendar is continually updated. Residents who need help making an appointment can call the hotline at 707-565-4667 in English and Spanish.

In addition to pop-up clinics, multi-day clinics include:

- Sutter operates a daily clinic at 2360 Mendocino Ave. in Santa Rosa from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Appointments required.
- The Roseland Community Center clinic is operated by Fox Home Health at 779 Sebastopol Road. It is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9

a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (ages 5-plus). No appointment needed for first, second or booster shots.

- Fox Home Health's clinic is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 1400 N. Dutton Ave., Suite 17, Santa Rosa. Appointments required.
- Rohnert Park Community Center clinic at 5401 Snyder Lane is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. (ages 5-plus) Appointments required.
- Alliance Medical Center's clinic at 1381 University Ave. in Healdsburg is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (ages 5-plus) Appointments required. (707) 433-5494
- Rohnert Park Health Center operates a clinic at 5900 State Farm Dr. Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 1:15 (ages 12-plus) and 3 p.m. to 7:15 p.m. (ages 5-plus). Appointment needed for first, second or booster doses, call (707) 559-7500.
- Petaluma Health Center's clinic at 1179 N. McDowell Blvd. is open Tuesday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. and 1:30 to 4:45 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday, ages 12-plus (Pfizer); Wednesday and Friday, ages 18-plus (Moderna). Appointments required, call (707) 559-7500.
- Sonoma Valley Community Health Center clinic at 19270 Sonoma Hwy., Sonoma, is open Wednesdays and Thursdays from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturdays from noon to 3 p.m. Ages 12-plus. No appointment needed. Questions? Call 939-6070. Go to svhpvaccines.org for details.

Testing updates, including local antigen rapid test sites

The county is now averaging about 6,400 tests a day, compared with about 3,000 before Christmas. That total doesn't include all the at-home rapid tests being used. As demand surges for testing, both PCR and rapid, the County Department of Health Services continues to work with our testing partners to make more testing available.

Testing is in short supply because of demand combined with staffing issues related to workers testing positive. Appointments are recommended as few sites can accommodate walk-in requests due to demand. The county's [testing page](#) includes a map to make it easier to find a convenient site.

Residents can call the county hotline at 707-565-4667 (4701 in Spanish) for help making an appointment. PCR tests remain the "gold standard." Self-administered rapid antigen tests are available over the counter and online, including [four free at-home tests](#) from the federal government. Everyone is urged to report a positive at-home test result to the hotline.

Antigen "rapid" testing is now available at county-sponsored sites without an appointment with results available in one hour or less. The testing

is confidential and available at no cost. Social Security and citizenship are not required. Children two years and older can test with family support. The program is through the county Department of Health Services.

- Wednesdays, Andy's Unity Park, 3399 Moorland Ave., Santa Rosa, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
- Thursdays, the Grange Hall, 201 Commercial St., Cloverdale, from 9:15 to 11:15 a.m.
- The clinic at the Roseland Community Center also is conducting antigen "rapid" testing of symptomatic individuals based on medical assessment and as tests are available. The clinic is open Tuesday through Saturday (see information below).

Use the county's [pop-up testing calendar](#) to find a site.

Fox Home Health: Call 707-573-0223 x101 for an appointment.

- Roseland Community Center, 779 Sebastopol Road, Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Saturday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Antigen "rapid" testing of symptomatic individuals is offered based on medical assessment and as tests are available.

Molecular Matrix: Make an appointment at the [Molecular Matrix website](#).

- Petaluma's Foundry Wharf, 625 Second St., Saturday, Sunday and Monday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Petaluma Valley Baptist Church, 580 Sonoma Mountain Pkwy., Thursdays and Fridays, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Andy Lopez Unity Park, 3399 Moorland Ave., Santa Rosa, Mondays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Redemption Hill Church, 2100 Petaluma Hill Road, Santa Rosa, Monday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

LHI: Appointments are highly recommended at <https://lhi.care/covidtesting> or call 866-284-8788. LHI offers testing from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at:

- Monte Rio Community Center, 20488 Hwy. 116, Monte Rio, Mondays
- Petaluma Valley Baptist Church, 580 Sonoma Mountain Pkwy., Tuesdays, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- Cotati Park and Ride, St. Joseph Way at Highways 116 and 101, Wednesdays
- Galvin Park, 3330 Yulupa Ave., Santa Rosa, Thursdays.
- Salvation Army, 721 S. McDowell Blvd., Petaluma, Friday
- A Place to Play Park, 2375 W. 3rd St., Santa Rosa, Friday
- Alliance Medical Center, 1381 University Ave., Healdsburg, Saturdays.

- Knox Presbyterian Church, 1650 W. 3rd St., Santa Rosa, Saturdays.
- West County High School, 6950 Analy Ave., Sebastopol, Sundays

Curative: Appointments are recommended; call 888-702-9042. Curative has had to close several testing sites because of staffing issues. Testing is available at these locations:

- Coddington (Target lot), 1000 Coddington Center, Santa Rosa, daily, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. cur.tv/coddington
- Fiesta Plaza, 200 Siesta Way, Sonoma, Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. cur.tv/fiestaplaza
- Windsor Bluebird Center, 25 Bluebird Dr., Sunday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. cur.tv/windsor
- Rohnert Park Community Center, 5401 Snyder Lane, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. cur.tv/rohnertpark
- Healdsburg Community Center, 1557 Healdsburg Ave., Mondays, 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. cur.tv/healdsburg
- Cloverdale High School, 509 N. Cloverdale Blvd., Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. cur.tv/cloverdale
- West County Community Services, 15010 Armstrong Woods Road, Guerneville, Wednesdays, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. cur.tv/west
- Geyserville Elementary School, 21485 Geyserville Ave., Thursdays, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. cur.tv/geyserville

On-site COVID-19 testing is available for businesses, health centers, congregate facilities, faith-based or community-based organizations or schools that would like to offer testing. They can partner with California's COVID-19 Testing Task Force to set up testing. To find out more, visit the task force's [Get Started](#) page. For local help with your organization's testing questions, email questions or requests to COVIDTest@sonoma-county.org.

The California Department of Public Health has created a [fact sheet](#) to help Californians understand when they should get tested for COVID-19.

County Superior Court postpones trials that haven't started

Sonoma County Superior Court on Jan. 3 [issued an emergency order](#) delaying all civil and criminal trials not currently in progress until March due to the Omicron-fueled surge. All criminal jury trials that have not begun will be postponed to after March 1 or later. Civil jury trial proceedings are delayed to after March 31. The order outlines other safety measures.

- Everyone in the courthouse regardless of vaccination status must mask at all times, including employees, staff, attorneys, witnesses and the public.
- Judges may allow a defendant to briefly lower their mask for the purposes of identification for the record.

A quarter of inmates test positive in outbreak at county jail

At least 174 of the more than 700 inmates at the Sonoma County Jail have tested positive for COVID-19 in an outbreak driven over the past three weeks by the Omicron variant. In addition, 20 correctional deputies were out with COVID-19 as of Tuesday. Despite the outbreak, no inmates have been seriously ill or hospitalized so far, jail officials said. The outbreak began with a staff member testing positive on Dec. 28. Despite the jail's early efforts to isolate the infected, the highly contagious virus has spread to four detention units. The isolation protocol will be lifted for each of the four affected units once every person within them tests negative at least twice for 10 days. San Quentin State Prison in Marin County also is experiencing a COVID outbreak, with 240 inmate and 128 staff cases in the past two weeks as of Tuesday, up from six inmate and 73 staff cases a week ago. The prison houses 3,140 prisoners. San Quentin, along with other state correctional facilities, has been locked down since Jan. 10 in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus.

Sonoma State to start spring semester classes mostly remote

Sonoma State University announced on Jan. 11 that it will begin its spring semester with most of its courses moving to online instruction for three weeks. SSU President Judy Sakaki said she made her decision after Sonoma County's health officer ordered a 30-day ban on large gatherings and urged residents to stay home except for essential activities, such as work or school. The county health order will be in effect through at least Feb. 11. Sonoma State's move to online instruction will be in place from the start of the semester on Jan. 24 until when the county health order expires.

- Sonoma State is requiring students, staff and faculty to present proof of a booster COVID shot to attend classes or work in person. The deadline for that mandate is Feb. 28. California State University said on Dec. 22 that it will require students, faculty and staff at its campuses to get booster shots for the spring semester.
- The University of California on Dec. 21 announced a similar mandate.

High court blocks vaccine mandate for large companies

The U.S. Supreme blocked the Biden administration from enforcing a vaccine-or-testing mandate for large employers. The court allowed a more limited mandate requiring health care workers at facilities receiving federal money to be vaccinated. The vote in the employer mandate case was 6 to 3. The vote in the health care case was 5 to 4. The unsigned majority opinion in the employer case said a statute on workplace hazards did not justify a mandate that would have required more than 80 million workers to be vaccinated against the coronavirus or to wear masks and be tested weekly.

Guidance for gatherings, travel

People who are not vaccinated should avoid travel and gatherings, according to guidance from the California Department of Public Health. Residents planning to travel should make sure they have documents required by some destinations, airlines and events to prove their vaccination or testing status. Some destinations and events require a COVID-19 test or proof of vaccination. Research the requirements of your airline, destination or event to ensure you are prepared. Don't wait until the last minute to schedule an appointment. The latest CDC guidelines for travel can be viewed here.

You can obtain a digital copy of your California vaccine record from my vaccine record.cdph.ca.gov. If there are problems with the digital vaccine record, they can take two to three weeks to fix. Keep your paper CDC card in a secure place; make copies and save pictures on your phone.

New state rules for visitors to hospitals, long-term care settings

Given the transmissibility of the Omicron variant, the state determined that amendments to the State Public Health Officer Order of Aug. 26, 2021, to make boosters mandatory and to require additional testing of visitors eligible for boosters who are not yet boosted, are necessary at this critical time for hospitals and long-term care settings, including skilled nursing facilities and residential care facilities. The health order took effect on Jan. 7.

FDA approves first COVID pill that is effective against severe illness

The Food and Drug Administration on Dec. 22 authorized the first pill for COVID-19, offering a highly effective defense against severe illness. The drug, developed by Pfizer and known as Paxlovid, is authorized for COVID patients age 12 and over who are vulnerable to becoming severely ill because they are older or have medical conditions such as obesity or diabetes.

- Pfizer's laboratory studies indicate that its pills are likely to work against the Omicron variant.
- The treatment is meant to be taken as 30 pills over five days.

- A clinical trial indicated that Paxlovid was highly effective when taken soon after an infection. Pfizer's drug reduced the risk of hospitalization or death by 88 percent when given to high-risk unvaccinated volunteers within five days of the start of their symptoms.
- Paxlovid appears to be substantially more effective than a similar antiviral pill from Merck (see below), known as molnupiravir, that was approved Thursday by the FDA. In a clinical trial, Merck's drug reduced risk of hospitalization and death for high-risk patients by 30 percent.

FDA authorizes Merck pill for high-risk patients

The Food and Drug Administration has authorized a second antiviral pill for COVID but said it should not be preferred over other treatments. The FDA cleared the pill, developed by Merck and known as molnupiravir, for adults who are vulnerable to becoming severely ill from COVID and for whom alternative treatment options are "not accessible or clinically appropriate." The agency's decision reflects concerns that Merck's pill is only modestly effective and carries possible safety risks, including for pregnant women. Merck's treatment is expected to be available early next month.

- Older people and those who have conditions like obesity, diabetes or heart disease would be eligible to get a prescription for Merck's pills if they become sick from the coronavirus and cannot get treatments like Pfizer's newly authorized pills or monoclonal antibody drugs. Both vaccinated and unvaccinated people will be eligible.
- While the FDA authorized Pfizer's treatment for high-risk COVID patients as young as 12, it said that it was authorizing Merck's drug only for adults because it "may affect bone and cartilage growth."
- Merck's treatment is meant to be taken as 40 pills over five days.

Vaccinations not linked to pre-term births, study finds

Women who received COVID vaccinations while pregnant were at no greater risk of delivering their babies prematurely or of giving birth to unusually small babies than pregnant women who did not get vaccinated. The study was one of the first to examine the health of babies born to women vaccinated during pregnancy. An earlier study found that women vaccinated during pregnancy did not face a higher risk of miscarriage than the unvaccinated. The new study looked at some 46,079 singleton pregnancies that resulted in a live birth, including 10,064 among women who received one or more doses of vaccine between Dec. 15, 2020, and July 22, 2021, during their pregnancies. Most had received the vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna.

CDC recommends Pfizer, Moderna vaccines over J&J's

There are three COVID vaccines available. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has full FDA approval for persons ages 16 and older, and emergency Use Authorization for use in persons 5 to 15 years of age. The Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines have been approved by the FDA for emergency use. The CDC recommends the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines as preferred options to the Johnson & Johnson vaccine when possible.

- The CDC's expert advisers cited increasing evidence that Johnson & Johnson's shots can trigger a rare blood clot disorder now linked to dozens of cases and at least nine deaths in the United States in the last year. The risk was greatest among women 30 to 49, estimated at 1 in 100,000 who had received the company's shot.
- The J&J vaccine will remain an option for people who are "unable or unwilling" to receive shots from Moderna or Pfizer, the CDC said.

COVID was the leading cause of death among police officers in 2021

COVID-19 was the leading cause of death for law enforcement officers in the United States for the second year in a row, according to a report by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. A total of 458 officers died in the line of duty last year, making it the deadliest year in more than 90 years and a 55 percent increase from 2020, according to preliminary data compiled by the organization. The report found that 301 federal, state, tribal and local law enforcement officers had died because of COVID.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program

Sonoma County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program offers financial support to tenants and landlords. Apply on [SoCoEmergency.org/ERAP](https://www.socoemergency.org/ERAP), call 2-1-1 for an operator to assist in English and Spanish or visit the online [page](#) for a list of organizations that can assist in applying. Other key information:

- The program provides payment assistance for tenants who are behind on rent and utilities. It also provides options for landlords to participate and receive financial assistance.
- This program is open to all residents, regardless of immigration status.
- As of Jan. 10, the county has distributed \$25.6 million to community based organizations handling applications for assistance. Of that amount, \$22.8 million has been distributed to applicants. The county has a total of \$42.7 million under contract to the CBOs; \$21.5 million is the total amount remaining to be disbursed from the second rounds of state and federal funding.
- The expanded program removed the limit of one application per household, removing restrictions on applications from roommates.

- Individuals also can apply for 100 percent of utility bills to be paid.
- Tenants may apply for a total of 18 months worth of rental support.

Mortgage relief available for some homeowners behind on loans

California homeowners who have fallen behind on home loans can apply for a state grant to repay missed mortgage payments during the pandemic. The California Mortgage Relief Program covers past due mortgage payments in full through a grant of up to \$80,000 per household. The money will go directly to a homeowners' mortgage servicer. It's free to enroll and funds do not need to be repaid. Applicants can visit CaMortgageRelief.org to check eligibility and apply through the online portal. Eligible applicants must be at or below 100 percent of their county's Area Median Income (\$116,300 for a household of four in Sonoma County), own a single-family home, condo or manufactured home and have faced a pandemic-related financial hardship after January 21, 2020, and meet at least one of the following qualifications:

- They are receiving public assistance.
- They are severely housing burdened.
- They have no alternative mortgage workout options through their mortgage servicer.

Resources and useful links for residents and business owners

- Free COVID-19 testing is available for tribal communities at Sonoma County Indian Health Project. Call 707-521-4500 for details.
- Listos California offers disaster preparedness information in indigenous languages at its [Farmworkers Initiative](https://FarmworkersInitiative.org) webpage.

Information for businesses is available at SoCoLaunch.org.