



Sonoma County
Key Messages: Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)
January 26, 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.

Vaccine Distribution

Milestones: As of today, 972,596 doses have been administered to Sonoma County residents.

Residents fully vaccinated: 370,692 - equal to 78.8 percent of the county's eligible population.

Residents partially vaccinated: 37,310 - equal to 7.9 percent of the county's eligible population.

Residents who have received boosters: 198,479 - equal to 59.2 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, along with getting vaccinated. Boosters provide protection 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 16.4 times more likely to be hospitalized if they get COVID and they are 13.6 times more likely to die from COVID.

Children ages 5 to 17 can only receive the Pfizer vaccine. Children ages 12 and older are 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.

To date 408,000 residents have received at least one dose -- 82.5 percent percent of the county's total population. That means nearly 86 percent of our eligible 5 and older population is now fully or partially vaccinated. By comparison, 72.7 percent of the eligible California population is fully

vaccinated with 8.9 percent partially vaccinated. Nationally, 80.5 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 to the county by using a new online form available in English and Spanish. A message with resources and guidance about how to navigate a positive result will be sent once the form is submitted. If you have concerns about privacy, these forms can be submitted anonymously. You also can call 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. The county is working to increase testing. Every U.S. household can now order four free tests.

Current Sonoma County metrics:

- Our rate of new daily cases per 100,000 population is 203.1.
- Our case rate for unvaccinated individuals is 402.4 per 100,000 compared with 162.6 for vaccinated residents.
- Our overall testing positivity rate is 21.9 percent.
- Our equity metric testing positivity rate is 27.8 percent.

Update on local case rates and hospitalizations

New case rates appear to have peaked, but local case rates and COVID-related hospitalizations remain at some of the highest levels of the pandemic. On Dec. 1, we were averaging 60 new cases a day (12 per 100,000 residents); on Jan. 1, we were averaging 500 new cases a day. We are still averaging 1,000 new cases per day, down from 1,200 a day last week. 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. There were 107 COVID-related hospitalizations in the county as of Tuesday, compared with 28 on Jan. 3. Nineteen of those COVID patients were in ICU beds, up from four on Jan. 3 and the highest total since mid-September. The unvaccinated still account for most hospitalizations here, especially in our intensive care units. Deaths are increasing, primarily among the elderly. The number of COVID-related patients is impacting the capacity of our hospitals to care for other patients, with some surgeries being postponed. Emergency departments are experiencing long wait times.

In California, 15,200 people are now hospitalized with COVID, up from about 4,800 on Dec. 28, but half of what officials had feared if mitigation measures were not put in place. The state's projection model shows the number of hospitalizations falling by half, to less than 7,700, in another month. Omicron is extremely contagious and is easily transmitted during gatherings. 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 slow the spread of the virus here. 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 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.

Dr. Mase told the Board of Supervisors last week that Sonoma County is experiencing an unusually high amount of community spread and COVID-related hospitalizations, requiring that immediate steps be taken to protect the community, preserve hospital capacity and promote equity. 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 hospitals. County health was seeing multiple outbreaks from gatherings, including among the vaccinated.

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. Patients with COVID 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. County residents 65 and older have accounted for 73.6 percent of the 432 COVID-related deaths. There have been 16 COVID-related deaths since Dec. 1, with 11 reported so far in January. Most of the deaths have been unvaccinated residents or vaccinated residents who are elderly and had other medical conditions. The last three deaths reported were all residents over the age of 70. Two were unvaccinated. Deaths typically lag hospitalizations by a month or more.

In addition to 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 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 have accounted for more than half 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.

Large vaccine clinics to be held at county fairgrounds

The county will expand access to pediatric and adult COVID-19 vaccines and boosters through a series of large-scale weekend clinics at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds. Up to 500 vaccines can be administered per day at these clinics, which will be held in the Garrett Building. Clinics will be on Saturday and Sunday for the next four weekends, Jan. 29-30 and Feb. 5-6, 12-13, and 19-20 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The eight clinics are open to everyone in the community, but are particularly focused on children and those 12 years and older who still need their boosters. Just 29 percent of children ages 5-11 are fully vaccinated. Additionally, only 59.2 percent of the eligible population is both fully vaccinated and boosted.

- Though appointments are not needed, you can guarantee a spot by signing up myturn.ca.gov.
- Vaccines are free, the clinics are open to all and proof of citizenship status is not required.
- The Garrett Building is on the east side of the Fairgrounds, accessible from the Brookwood Avenue entrance.

Update on situation in local schools and pediatric vaccines

The Sonoma County Office of Education and county public health held two webinars last week on pediatric vaccines and COVID cases in our local schools. The webinars in English and Spanish are available for viewing on the county's YouTube channel. Local doctors and health officials emphasized the safety of vaccines and the importance of parents getting their eligible children vaccinated. There have been 1,347 student cases reported in the county since August and 171 staff cases. Public health nurses estimate there have been thousands of additional positive cases among school children since classes resumed after the holidays, with many schools struggling to stay open. 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 here, more than any other age group.

Health and education officials are working to keep local schools open, including holding vaccination clinics. Key information about the efforts:

- More than 43 percent of the county's eligible children ages 5 to 11 have received at least one dose since the vaccine became available in November. Twenty-nine percent of those children are fully vaccinated.
- The county's pediatric vaccine campaign is planned with a focus on equity. School-based clinics are in areas with high case rates, a high number of English learners, and with lower vaccination rates.
- A list of [school-based clinics](#) is on the Sonoma County Office of Education website along with information for parents.
- All doses are available at no cost to children or their parents.
- 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.
- Testimonial videos by local doctors, parents and students about the benefits of vaccines are available at the county's [COVID video library](#), on the county's [YouTube channel](#), and on the county [Office of Education vaccine information page](#).

Other developments and trends

- Daily U.S. cases are averaging 652,000, down 14 percent in two weeks, according to a New York Times [database](#). However, COVID deaths have increased 35 percent in the past two weeks to 2,362 a day. The United States has recorded 871,000 COVID-19 deaths.
- The CDC estimates that the Omicron variant now accounts for [99.9 percent of COVID cases](#) in the United States.
- Reported cases among U.S. children have spiked. For the week ending Jan. 20, 1.1 million child COVID cases were reported, a doubling of new cases from two weeks prior. More than 10.6 million children have tested positive; 2.1 million of these cases have been in the past two weeks, according to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).
- You can obtain a digital copy of your California vaccine record at [my vaccine record.cdph.ca.gov](#).

How to 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. Go to [covidtests.gov](#) to order. President Biden said 1 billion rapid at-home tests will be distributed free to

Americans. Each household will be limited to four free tests.

U.S. starts providing 400 million free N95 masks to residents

The first wave of 400 million free high-filtration masks provided by the Biden administration have been shipped to participating pharmacies and community health centers, with more to follow. A limited number of masks are currently available, with more arriving in coming days. Nearly all of the pharmacies and community healthcare centers that participated in the government's free vaccine program have agreed to distribute the free masks, according to the White House. This means most major chains, such as Rite-Aid, Walgreens and CVS, will have them, along with many independent locations. Other key information:

- No documentation of any kind is required to pick up masks.
- Providers will hand out three N95 masks per day per person. More than one person from the same household can get them.
- The Biden administration plans to start shipping high-quality masks for children in the near future. There are no certified N95 masks available yet in children's sizes.
- The [CDC's website](#) has a breakdown of vaccine program participants.
- The masks will come from the government's Strategic National Stockpile, which has more than 750 million of the masks on hand.
- N95 respirators are so named because they can filter out 95 percent of all airborne particles when used correctly.
- The CDC on Jan. 14 [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. The CDC also offers advice on [how to tell if a N95 mask is a fake](#).

What to consider when choosing a mask for kids

California has 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. 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

If you test positive for COVID, the first thing you should do is isolate yourself for at least five days to avoid infecting others. Follow the latest instructions on the county's [Isolation and Quarantine page](#). They include:

- 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.
- California 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, please report the results to the county health department by using a new online form available in English and Spanish. You also can call 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.
- California public health has fact sheets in English and now in Spanish to help residents understand current self-isolation guidance.

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).

California has launched a new Treatments Resources Page with information about several COVID-19 treatment options currently available in California.

California likely to again require paid sick leave for COVID

California workers would get up to two weeks of paid time off if they get sick from the coronavirus while businesses would get up to \$6 billion in tax cuts and other assistance under a proposal endorsed Tuesday by Gov. Gavin Newsom and top legislative leaders. California had a similar law in place last year, but it expired in September. Since then, the Omicron variant emerged. Labor unions have urged state officials to bring the paid sick leave law back. Endorsements from the state's top Democrats ensure the legislation will pass. The state Legislature is expected to fast-track a bill. Key information:

- The proposal calls for workers to get one week of paid time off. Workers would get a second week off if they or their family members test positive for the virus.

- Workers who either refuse to be tested or won't share the results with their employers would not get the extra week off.
- The paid leave requirement would apply to eligible absences between Jan. 1 and Sept. 30 at companies with more than 25 employees.
- The requirement for part-time workers would be the number of hours the worker typically worked in a week, to start with, and then that same amount again if the worker tests positive.
- The bill would also restore some business tax credits to help companies absorb the cost of the additional paid time off.
- State law requires employers to offer a minimum of three paid sick days a year. When the pandemic hit, the state raised that requirement, using state and federal laws and tax credits to add up to 80 hours of paid sick leave for workers.

Booster shots keeping Americans out of the hospital

Booster shots of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are not just reducing the number of infections with the Omicron variant, they're also keeping infected Americans out of hospitals, according to data published Friday by the CDC.

- The extra doses are 90 percent effective at preventing hospitalization with the variant, the CDC reported.
- Booster shots also reduce the likelihood of a visit to an emergency department or urgent care clinic.
- The data showed that extra doses are most beneficial against infection and death among Americans ages 50 and older.
- Two of the studies were in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Report.
- The CDC reports that 85 million fully vaccinated people have received an additional vaccine dose in the United States.

Local vaccination 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 (ages 12-plus).
- 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. Call (707) 573-0223 for information.

- 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 (ages 12-plus). Call (707) 573-0223.
- 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, 18-plus (Moderna). Appointments needed. (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 averaging about 6,000 tests a day, compared with 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. 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. The county urges anyone who tests positive using an at-home antigen test to report the result by using this [online form](#).

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 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.
- 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, Tuesdays and 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. 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
- New Life Christian Fellowship, 1315 Rand St., Petaluma, Tuesday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- 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
- Boyes Hot Springs Park and Ride, Boyes Hot Springs, Highway 12 and Thompson Avenue, Sunday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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.

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. The variant also 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, researchers found that not a single patient went on a ventilator during that time.

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.

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. 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. The new U.S. policy does not apply to at-home tests purchased before Jan. 15. FAQs provide more information.

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

Abbott BinaxNOW, a popular at-home antigen 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. Like all rapid antigen tests, BinaxNOW 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.

- 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.

Sonoma State starts 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 after Sonoma County's health officer ordered a 30-day ban on large

gatherings and urged residents to stay home except for essential activities. The county health order will be in effect through at least Feb. 11. Sonoma State's online instruction will be in place from the start of the semester, which was Monday, until when the county health order expires.

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, county health officer. The guidelines are voluntary but strongly recommended to help mitigate a surge in cases. Dr. Mase issued two health orders last month requiring booster shots or twice-weekly testing for school employees and for personnel working in fire, law enforcement, emergency medical services, pharmacies and dental offices. The orders take effect Feb. 1.

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](#).

Sonoma County rescinds face mask exemption

Sonoma County on Dec. 29 joined four 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. Sonoma County has required facial coverings in most indoor public settings since August.

Complaints received for health order on face coverings

Permit Sonoma's Code Enforcement unit has received 390 complaints about public health violations across Sonoma County and its cities regarding the [public health order](#) requiring face coverings in workplaces and public settings since it was reinstated in August. No citations have been issued for violations that the county is aware of. A breakdown as of Monday (Jan. 24):

- 75.9 percent of complaints (296) have been for businesses, not including gyms/fitness centers.
- 20 percent of complaints (78) have been for gyms/fitness centers.
- 95 percent were about employees and/or customers not wearing masks. Three percent were about potential cases or exposures.

All complaints within Code Enforcement's jurisdiction are investigated by an inspector, who visits the site and provides information on the public health order. Complaints outside of Code Enforcement's jurisdiction are referred to the appropriate agency. How to file non-emergency complaints.

- Call (833) SAFE707 (1-833-723-3707)
- Email safe707@sonoma-county.org
- Online [SoCo Report It](#)

The county has jurisdiction over unincorporated areas. A breakdown:

- Sonoma County -- 60 complaints
 - 50 complaints were referred to Code Enforcement
 - 7 complaints were referred to County Health
 - 3 complaints were referred to County Environmental Health
- 121 complaints referred to Santa Rosa
- 72 complaints referred to Petaluma
- 43 complaints referred to Rohnert Park
- 26 complaints referred to Cotati
- 26 complaints referred to the city of Sonoma
- 14 complaints referred to Healdsburg
- 12 complaints referred to Sebastopol
- 11 complaints referred to Windsor
- 5 complaints referred to Cloverdale

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.sococoemergency.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.
- The expanded program removed the limit of one application per household, removing restrictions on applications from roommates.

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 webpage.
- Information for businesses is available at [SoCoLaunch.org](https://www.socolaunch.org).