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## **City of Northampton Board of Health Issues Public Health Mask Advisory High Risk of COVID-19 Transmission**

NORTHAMPTON - On May 25, 2022, the Northampton Board of Health assessed the risk of COVID-19 transmission in Northampton to be high. Therefore, the Board of Health recommends that all individuals over the age of two (2) wear a well-fitted high filtration mask when indoors in public settings. This is particularly important in settings that are crowded or where ventilation is poor. Those who have underlying conditions that increase risk for severe illness should take extra precautions.

On May 19, 2022, Northampton was noted to have high COVID-19 community transmission and evidence of increasing pressure on the healthcare system. In addition, the majority of the counties in the Commonwealth are reporting high community levels, and Hampshire County is approaching high community levels per U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 community level indicators: incidence of infection (new cases per 100,000 people in the last seven days), new hospital admissions with COVID-19 per 100,000 people in the last seven days, and percent of inpatient beds occupied by COVID-19 patients.

COVID-19 infection is transmitted predominately by inhalation of respiratory droplets and airborne particles, and studies show that face masks block the release of respiratory droplets into the environment and can also reduce the wearer's exposure to droplets from others. COVID-19 is airborne, and viral particles spread between people more readily indoors and when people are closer together for longer periods of time indoors.

The World Health Organization and the CDC have advised all individuals to take measures to reduce their risk of COVID-19, especially the Omicron variants, including proven public health and social measures such as wearing well-fitting masks, hand hygiene, physical distancing, improving ventilation of indoor spaces, avoiding crowded spaces, and getting vaccinated.

**THEREFORE, the Northampton Board of Health is publishing the following recommendations:**

1. It is highly recommended that all individuals, regardless of vaccination status or past COVID-19 infection, wear a mask at all times when indoors and in a public setting, including at groceries, building lobbies, offices, stores, and other common or shared spaces where individuals may interact such as restrooms, hallways, elevators, and meeting rooms. This is particularly important in settings that are crowded or where ventilation is poor. This advisory applies to all individuals over the age of two years who can medically tolerate wearing a mask.

2. All masks should cover the nose and the mouth and rest snugly above the nose, below the mouth, and on the sides of the face. Higher-quality masks, such as KN95 and KF94 masks and N95 respirators, can offer an additional layer of protection and are preferred. Wearing a cloth mask over a disposable mask or knotting the ear loops to tighten disposable masks are additional techniques to improve fit and protection.
3. Those who have underlying conditions that increase risk for severe illness, are over 65 years old, or are unvaccinated including children under the age of five who are not yet eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine should take additional precautions. These groups are at increased risk of hospitalization, severe illness, and possible long-term complications, and should always wear a mask in public indoor settings and crowded outdoor settings. Avoid crowded settings and non-essential gatherings, particularly if indoors.
4. In addition, the impact of COVID-19 transmission is higher in settings with a high number of unvaccinated people; these include childcare facilities given that children under the age of five are not yet eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. Even though COVID-19 is generally less dangerous for children, it can result in hospitalization, as well as Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C), long COVID, and possibly other long-term complications - which can occur even with only mild infection, including in children.
5. The mask advisory does not apply in cases where an individual is actively performing an activity that cannot be done while wearing a face mask such as actively eating or drinking; is practicing or playing a competitive sport in the Northampton schools or on a professional level; or is performing, including but not limited to playing music, delivering a speech to an audience seated at least six feet away, and acting in a theater. Individuals who are engaging in these activities are advised to apply their mask once the activity is completed.

This advisory is for public education only and should not be construed as regulation of any kind.

For more information visit [northamptonma.gov/health](https://northamptonma.gov/health) or call 413-587-1214.