

For immediate release: May 14, 2021

**Press Release**  
**Health Officer Face Coverings Order Rescinded**

Based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued yesterday, and on improving epidemiology of our COVID-19 outbreak in Gallatin County, Health Officer Matt Kelley is rescinding the local Health Officer order related to face coverings, effective today. This decision is based on a number of factors:

- [New CDC guidance](#) issued yesterday stated that people who are **fully vaccinated** (meaning two weeks past their final shot) no longer need to wear masks in many settings;
- The epidemiology in Gallatin County has improved significantly in recent weeks, including in areas consistently identified by the Board of Health as important to informing decision making. These factors include a reduction in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths; adequate capacity at the hospital to deal with those who need care; timely turnaround within our COVID-19 testing system; decreasing test positivity rates among those tested; and adequate capacity to conduct contact tracing for cases that are identified.
- We now have enough vaccine and enough resources to dispense the vaccine to a degree that everyone 16 and older in Gallatin County has had opportunity to get the vaccine if they want to.

“The Board of Health has always been clear about basing decisions on the best public health guidance available and our local epidemiology. Based on those factors, now is the time to move past requirements from the health department to allow organizations and individuals to make decisions based on the best CDC guidance available,” said Matt Kelley, Gallatin County Health Officer.

The local Health Officer order mirrors the Gallatin City-County Board of Health rule for face covering use in the county. While the Board of Health rule technically remains in place until its May 27 expiration, Kelley said that there will be no enforcement of that rule.

Kelley stressed that the new CDC guidance and the decision to rescind the health officer order do not mean that the pandemic is over, and does not give anyone the right to ignore policies and rules put in place by businesses and other organizations. Kelley also noted that the CDC continues to recommend mask use in certain settings, including schools, health care facilities, and congregate settings such as correctional facilities. Businesses and organizations still have the authority and right to make decisions on requiring masks. CDC continues to recommend [prevention measures](#) for unvaccinated people that includes wearing a mask and social distancing, Kelley said.



Kelley noted he would also be rescinding a health officer order regarding nursing homes and assisted living facilities on Friday. He said the health department will continue to work proactively with nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other senior-serving organizations to continue to follow all necessary infection prevention and control measures recommended by the CDC and other public health experts.

“This virus is still dangerous, especially for people who are not vaccinated,” Kelley said. “We recommend that all organizations continue to follow CDC guidance, and we urge all individuals to respect and follow those decisions. We will get back to normal if people keep getting vaccinated, and if we work together to limit transmission in higher risk settings.”

Kelley emphasized that the Board of Health has always worked to base its decisions on local epidemiology and the best guidance available from public health experts and the scientific community. He noted that the county’s rolling 7-day average of daily COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents is now well below 25 cases per day and has been for nearly two weeks, an important threshold of community spread. Hospitalizations have also remain relatively low, and testing capacity is good, Kelley said.

“The new CDC guidance on masks really drives home how important it is to get vaccinated,” Kelley said. “It shows that the vaccine is remarkably effective and safe. We urge everyone 12 and older to get the vaccine to protect themselves and to protect their community.”

The Gallatin City-County Health Department Call Center is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for questions about COVID-19. Reach the Call Center by phone at 406-548-0123 or email at [callcenter@readygallatin.com](mailto:callcenter@readygallatin.com).

The most accurate local source of information remains the GCCHD [website](#). Find information on COVID-19 vaccines in Gallatin County [here](#).

