

U.S. health officials urge indoor masking in major cities as 'triple-demic' rages

December 12 2022, by Cara Murez



As three highly contagious respiratory viruses spread across the United

States, straining hospitals and triggering drug shortages, health officials in some major cities and states are calling for a return to indoor masking.

Over the past few weeks, COVID-19, the flu and RSV have made millions of Americans ill, and indoor masking is seen as one way to slow the spread of the viruses.

In New York City, that means wearing face coverings in stores, on [public transit](#), at schools, in childcare facilities and in other public shared or crowded public spaces, health commissioner Dr. Ashwin Vasana [said](#) in a news release announcing the health advisory.

"The [holiday season](#) is about togetherness and there is a way to gather safely—even as respiratory viruses in our city are unusually high," Vasana said. "It starts with protecting yourself. Vaccination and boosters are critical but so are common sense precautions like masking when indoors or among crowds and staying home if you don't feel well."

In Los Angeles County, public health director Dr. Barbara Ferrer has [advised](#) wearing masks indoors, saying that the county may mandate masks if cases and hospitalization require it.

"Our shared goal during this pandemic has always been to reduce the burden of disease, hospitalization and death and we all know it takes a community to do so," Ferrer said. "When you put on your mask for these few weeks during this surge, it is about the people of LA County. It is about every individual, every visitor, our [healthcare workers](#), essential workers, and other people who serve. In addition to vaccination, it is one of the easiest things everyone can do right now."

Meanwhile, Washington and Oregon [health officials](#) have advised similar measures. In Washington state, 25 hospital executives and 12 county health officers have asked residents to mask indoors, *NPR*

reported, and the Oregon Health Authority has asked people to protect children and [older adults](#) by wearing masks in crowded indoor spaces.

"The combination of surging flu, RSV and COVID-19 cases is pushing hospitals past their current ICU bed capacity, which never happened during the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic in Oregon," Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state epidemiologist, said during a media briefing on Thursday, *NPR* reported.

More areas around the country have "high" infection rates, [Dr. Rochelle Walensky](#), director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told *NPR* last week.

"To protect communities in those circumstances at those high levels, we have recommended and continue to recommend that those communities wear masks," Walensky added.

The CDC advises that people living in areas that have high risk of COVID infection wear masks indoors. Right now, that's about [9% of U.S. counties](#).

The only states where there are only low community levels of COVID are Hawaii, Maine and New Hampshire. Levels are also low in Washington, D.C. All other states have at least one county with high COVID levels, *NPR* reported.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on COVID case counts in your area [here](#).

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