
March 16, 2022

BULLETIN

PROVINCE LIFTS MASK MANDATE

The Provincial Health Officer announced on March 10, 2022 that the requirement to wear masks in indoor public spaces would be lifted. As part of this change, new orders were issued around workplace safety plans and gatherings and events which reflect the removal of mask requirements. The Provincial Health Officer also announced plans to remove proof of vaccine requirements in the near future.

Mask Requirements Lifted

The *Face Coverings (COVID-19) Order*, which required people to wear masks in indoor public spaces, was repealed as of Friday March 11, 2022, except as it applies to school students, staff, and visitors to schools. The order is repealed for schools as of the end of the final school day before that school's spring break is scheduled to begin. Depending on the school district, this means that the mask mandate either lifted at the end of the school day on Friday March 11, or will be lifted at the end of the school day on Friday March 18. Scheduled spring break dates for BC school districts can be found on the [Province's website](#).

In repealing mandatory mask requirements, the public health order notice states that it “does not affect the authority of a medical health officer to make an order requiring the wearing of face coverings in the whole or part of the geographic area of the Province for which the medical health officer is designated.” As a result, requirements to wear a mask in certain public spaces may vary between areas in the Province, depending on the discretion of different medical health officers. Masks will also still be required province-wide in certain health care settings, such as long-term care facilities.

Requirements for Workplace COVID-19 Safety Plans Continued

The new *Workplace Safety Order* issued March 10, 2022 largely extends existing requirements for employers to create and maintain a COVID-19 safety plan for all workplaces. However, several changes have been made to reflect the lifting of mask requirements.

The *Workplace Safety Order* still requires employers to keep a COVID-19 safety plan that follows the guidelines set out by WorkSafeBC, and to periodically review that plan to ensure its adequacy. The Order also requires that all safety plans include certain measures, such as measures to prevent workers from congregating in indoor common areas, to ensure the maintenance of proper ventilation, and to support workers in receiving vaccinations for COVID-19. Workers still

must self-monitor for symptoms of illness and not come into the workplace if they have new or worsening COVID-19 symptoms. Likewise, employers still may not permit workers with new or worsening symptoms to remain in the workplace.

The Order no longer requires an employer's safety plan to require the use of masks in indoor common areas. Employers may choose to continue to require masks in the workplace as part of their COVID-19 safety plan. Employers must also permit a worker to wear a mask if that worker chooses to do so.

The new *Workplace Safety Order* is set to expire on April 8, 2022.

Gatherings and Events Order Revised

The new *Gatherings and Events Order* issued March 10, 2022 largely extends the existing requirement that event organizers check proof of vaccination for all event participants. The requirements centering around the use of masks at events however have been removed.

The new Order, consistent with the previous order, does not apply to "a council, board, or trust committee of a local authority as defined under the Community Charter, the Local Government Act, or the Islands Trust Act, a school board or a Board of Governors of a post-secondary institution". Nor does the Order apply to the use of a place for a local, provincial, or federal government purpose. The Order also does not apply to services provided by any level of government, except for "events", as defined by the Order, held inside by or on behalf of a recreation centre or a library.

The Order defines an "event" as an indoor gathering held for specific listed purposes. Specific purposes of note for local governments include:

- theatrical, musical or dance performance;
- recreational education or classes such as arts and crafts classes;
- exercise, swimming and sports activities and classes; and
- programs for children or youth.

A "program for children or youth" is an extra-curricular educational program provided for people under 22 years of age. "Worship services" were considered an event under the February 16 order, but the new Order does not apply to them.

Proof of vaccination for event participants is still required under the new Order. This does not apply to children under 12 years of age; people age 12 to 21 who are participating in youth programming; or people attending the event as a worker. Under the new Order, participants are no longer required to wear masks at indoor events. Organizers are also no longer required to ensure that participants wear masks during their events.

The new *Gatherings and Events Order* is set to expire on April 8, 2022. The Province has stated that they do not intend to extend the proof of vaccination requirements in the Order beyond that date.

Once the proof of vaccination requirement has been lifted, individual businesses and organizations can choose to continue to require proof of vaccination. The Province has also stated that proof of vaccination will still be required for visitors of long-term care facilities and other acute health-care settings.

Please consult us for further advice or information.

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