



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Douglas County health order requires masks in indoor public spaces beginning Wednesday

Measure is in response to recent increase in COVID-19 cases – including 33 new cases last weekend

LAWRENCE – People will be required to wear masks in all indoor public spaces where six feet of separation is not possible — including businesses, workplaces and public facilities such as community centers or libraries — in Douglas County beginning 12:01 a.m. Wednesday, July 1, according to a new [local health order](#) issued Monday.

“Unfortunately, we have seen a steady increase of cases in recent weeks, including localized outbreaks and more than 30 new cases over the past weekend — numbers we had not experienced locally during the pandemic,” said Douglas County’s Local Health Officer Dr. Thomas Marcellino. “Wearing masks and cloth face coverings is based on sound science that shows this practice will help slow the spread and decrease the transmission of COVID-19.”

Similar to other recent health orders issued in other states and counties, the order requires:

- Individuals to wear a mask covering the nose and mouth when in a public, indoor space, including a retail store or grocery store, workplace and public facilities such as a community center or library.
- Masks should be carefully positioned over the mouth and nose and in a manner to avoid touching or readjusting the mask until it is removed.
- Masks are not required inside solitary, enclosed workspaces, like an individual’s solitary office.
- Masks are not required when eating or drinking, but individuals should remain socially distanced and wear a mask before and following eating.

The order also allows for exemptions from wearing masks among:

- People who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Children younger than five years old.
 - Children younger than two should never wear face coverings due to the risk of suffocation.
- Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition or disability that prevents wearing a face covering.

“We want to set ourselves up to be in a better place when school starts back in August. We need to slow the spread now,” Marcellino said. “It is important for everyone to follow this important and effective public health measure of wearing a mask in indoor spaces where proper social distancing is not possible.”

Anyone with questions about compliance of a public health order can email phorders@ldchealth.org, where LDCPH staff will follow up on specific complaints.

“We are asking for compliance, and we are grateful for the individuals who have been wearing them and the businesses in our community who have been requiring masks so far in indoor spaces,” Director Dan Partridge said. “As we continue to work together, we believe this order will help as people do more to protect their neighbors and community by wearing masks.”

Douglas County remains in [Phase 3](#) of the county’s Smart & Safe Reopening Plan through July 5.

As part of Phase 3, mass gatherings of more than **45** individuals are prohibited. All businesses, activities and venues, including swimming pools, have been able to open in this phase provided they can meet requirements including maintaining at least six feet of social distance between individuals or groups.

Marcellino said because a majority of recent cases seem to stem from social gatherings and bar environments, the county’s COVID-19 recovery task force will make a decision before the end of the week about any potential changes to requirements in Phase 3.

Through 2 p.m., June 29, Douglas County has 157 COVID-19 cases (89 individuals have recovered) since its first lab-confirmed case on March 17, including 33 new cases since Friday. As of Monday morning, LMH Health had one inpatient positive for COVID-19, and Marcellino said while disease investigators are seeing a majority of the new cases among people younger than 30 who are generally healthier and don’t need to be hospitalized, it is important to keep them from exposing those who might be more vulnerable.

“We have seen some bright spots locally as long-term care facilities have instituted preventive and widespread testing to so far keep cases among our vulnerable population isolated and much lower than many other communities have experienced,” Director of Informatics Sonia Jordan said. “The key these next few weeks will be for the younger individuals to practice smart and safe habits to keep from potentially exposing those who might be vulnerable, especially in their workplaces or their parents or grandparents.”

Other important ways to reduce transmission of COVID-19 are:

- Practice social distancing, staying at least 6 feet apart from others when in public or outdoors;
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water is not immediately available;
- Cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow and avoid touching your face;
- Keep your home and office surfaces clean;
- Stay home as much as possible and keep your circle of contacts small.

Anyone in need of a cloth mask for personal use can submit [this form](#), where the United Way of Douglas County will try to provide you with one. Pick up is Monday and Thursdays from 12-2 p.m. at the United Way, 1307 Massachusetts St.

Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health maintains the Coronavirus hotline, 785-856-4343, and there are [options in the community for COVID-19 screening and testing](#). Always call a healthcare provider to let them know of your symptoms before showing up.

Members of the public can also check douglascountyks.org/coronavirus or ldchealth.org/coronavirus for information about COVID-19 in Douglas County.