

COVID-19 is Still Circulating in Our Communities

Benton County is seeing a rapid decline in many of the metrics that we have used to measure the COVID-19 pandemic: case counts, hospitalizations, and how full hospitals are. That combined with the county's high vaccination rate and availability of COVID-19 treatments means that we can follow Oregon's lead and move away from broad mandates to allow individuals, businesses, and organizations to decide what level of precaution is best for them. It doesn't mean that the pandemic is over, though.

While COVID-19 continues to circulate in our communities, it is important to assess the risks and decide what precautions are needed. Please use the information below to help you identify what risks you should consider, what precautions we can all take, and how we can navigate this next phase of the pandemic.

Risks to Consider

COVID-19 is spread by a highly transmissible virus, primarily through droplets expelled when speaking or breathing. Here are a few risks to consider when trying to decide what precautions you should take:

What is my medical risk? What is the medical risk for those around me?

- [Certain people](#) are at higher risk of COVID-19 complications, such as people over 65 years old or people with immunocompromising conditions.
- Speak with your doctor about your medical risk.

How well is an area ventilated? How fresh is the air?

- Because of the way COVID-19 is spread, moving air plays a large role in slowing transmission. This is why the risk of transmission is much lower when you're outdoors, but open windows, fans, and air purifiers can also provide significant protection.

How many people are here? How crowded is it?

- Risk increases with crowd size and density.

How long will I be here?

- Risk increases the longer you are in a location.

Is my acceptable risk higher or lower than this group's?

- Different people have different risk tolerances, and all for different reasons. Someone who lives with their elderly grandparents might want to be more cautious than someone with the same personal risk who lives alone. The riskier the group's behaviors are, the more precautions might be needed.

Community Level	Recommended Actions
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear a mask while in public spaces • Take additional precautions as needed if you're at high risk from COVID-19 <p>AND</p>
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a COVID-19 plan with your medical provider, including masking and other precautions <p>AND</p>
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay up to date on your COVID-19 vaccination • Get tested if you have symptoms

Community Risk Levels

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released a new framework called "[COVID-19 Community Levels](#)", which uses [three factors](#) to categorize counties across the United States into Low, Medium, or High risk categories. Each of these levels has a set of recommended precautions attached to them. This is an excellent tool for individuals and organizations to assess the level of risk in their community.

Benton County Information

The CDC uses information from the county to assign a Community Level, but there are other places you can find specific information on the situation in Benton County. Some measures of a community's COVID-19 risk to consider are: how many new cases have there been recently, how many COVID-19 related hospitalizations there are, whether those metrics are trending up or down, and what the level of vaccination is in the community.

Benton County's COVID-19 Website

- Cases, vaccinations, and more can all be found as part of our [Live Dashboards](#).
- The [COVID-19 website](#) is updated regularly with new information, in English and Spanish.

Oregon Health Authority's Hospitalizations Data

- [This dashboard](#) shows the average number of COVID-19 patients at each of Oregon's hospitals over the last 7 days.
- Benton County's hospital is the Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center.

COVID-19 Vaccination - Our Best Tool

The biggest action an individual can take to protect themselves and our community is to keep up to date on their [COVID-19 vaccinations](#). The COVID-19 vaccine is safe, free, and widely available in Benton County.

Who can be vaccinated for COVID-19?

- Anyone 5 years or older is eligible.
- Everyone 12 and over should receive a booster dose.

Where can you find a COVID-19 vaccination?

- Between medical providers, pharmacies, and special vaccination events there is an opportunity every day to get a COVID-19 vaccine. Check our [website](#) for more information.

Why should I be vaccinated?

- All approved COVID-19 vaccines are effective at preventing the worst outcomes of COVID-19, including severe symptoms, long COVID symptoms, hospitalization, and death.
- If you've never had COVID-19, being vaccinated will provide some protection against transmission, and will reduce the chances of severe symptoms, hospitalization, and death.
- Even if you have previously recovered from COVID-19, studies have found that being vaccinated in addition to your natural immunity provides stronger protection than just having recovered from infection.

What does the vaccine cost?

- The COVID-19 vaccine is free, even if you don't have insurance.

Is the vaccine safe?

- All approved COVID-19 vaccines are [safe and effective](#). In addition to rigorous testing, the vaccines are still being monitored by the FDA in ongoing safety studies.

Facemasks - Optional, Not Gone

Beginning March 12, the Oregon Health Authority and the Benton County Board of Commissioners removed the requirement that masks be worn in public indoor locations at all times. Though masks are optional, they remain an effective tool to protect against transmission of COVID-19.

Who should wear a mask?

- Everyone should assess their personal risk and decide what situations they feel a mask should be worn.
- For people at [high-risk](#) of COVID-19 complications it is still recommended that you practice universal indoor masking, using the most protective mask you can wear consistently.

When should I wear a mask?

- Many people will choose to continue wearing a mask whenever they are indoors.
- You might also wear a mask only in especially crowded areas, or only when you will be in an area for a longer time, or when community cases are climbing.
- You might choose not to mask when going to a convenience store, but wear one to go see a movie.

What kind of mask should I wear?

- You should wear the [most protective mask](#) you will be able to wear consistently the entire time it's needed.

N95 Respirator NIOSH-approved	KN95 Respirator	Disposable Mask Sometimes referred to as "surgical mask" or "medical procedure mask"	Cloth Mask Non-medical, made fabric
			
When worn correctly, respirators offer the highest level of protection and filter 95% of particles.	When worn correctly, KN95 provide more protection than disposable masks.	Disposable masks offer more protection than cloth masks.	Less effective than other masks. Layered finely woven cloth offers more protection than a single layer or loose cloth.

COVID-19 Testing - To Screen or Confirm

Knowing when you have COVID-19 is key to preventing community transmission. If you test positive or develop COVID-like symptoms (especially after a known exposure to a positive COVID-19 case), it is important to [seek testing](#) as soon as possible.

What kinds of tests are there?

- Rapid Antigen Testing, or at-home testing, gives results in as little as 15 minutes and is done without a medical provider.
- PCR testing is normally done by a medical provider, with a sample collected on site and sent to a lab for analysis - results usually take 1-3 days.

How much does testing cost?

- At-home kits are available over the counter at pharmacies and similar stores, and up to 8 tests per month are available for no cost with most private health insurance.
- PCR testing is available at many medical providers and some pharmacies, and is provided at no cost with most private health insurance.



Assess the risk...



Choose your tools...



Follow your plan!



If You Test Positive

Though masking and other restrictions have relaxed, the requirement for individuals who test positive to stay home has not changed. This is called "[isolation](#)".

What is isolation?

- Isolating is keeping someone with COVID-19 away from everyone who is not sick, staying in the house and in a separate room away from other people.

When do I need to stay home?

- If you test positive for COVID-19, or develop symptoms (especially after a known exposure), you should begin to isolate.

How long do I need to isolate?

- You should isolate for at least 5 days from when your symptoms began or you tested positive, and wear a mask in public for 5 days after your isolation ends.
- Isolation can end when you have not had a fever for 24 hours AND your symptoms are improving.

If you test positive for COVID-19



Days of isolation



+



Days of strict masking



Other Precautions We Can Take

Even in a setting without universal masking, we still have control over how protected we can be. In addition to vaccination and masking, there are a number of measures that can be taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

What can individuals do?

- Practice good hand hygiene: Wash often for at least 30 seconds with soap and water.
- Stay home when you are sick: If you test positive or have symptoms of COVID-19, you should begin isolation immediately for at least 5 days.
- Be selective about your activities: Consider how risky an activity is before engaging, and decide how much risk you are willing to accept. For example, you could choose to order take-out instead of dining indoors.
- Be mindful of crowds and distancing: The more people and the closer they are, the higher the risk of transmission. How long you stay in these locations is also a factor.
- Complete your errands at a different time of the day, when stores are less busy - even an hour can make a big difference.

What can businesses, organizations, or facilities do?

- Create opportunities for individuals to be responsible: Have hand cleaning stations, outdoor options, and give employees the flexibility to stay home if needed.
- Increase ventilation indoors: By having good airflow, COVID-19 particles have less opportunity to spread from one person to another. Open windows, fans, and air purifiers are all parts of a good ventilation system.
- Reduce crowding: Think about where people crowd the most in your location, and see what can be done to reduce those crowds or make them more safe. For example, increasing the locations where orders can be placed, or moving those locations outdoors or to a well ventilated area.
- Provide a virtual or take-out option for customers/clients/members.
- Organizations may choose to extend the masking policy or a variation of it. For example, setting an "employees only" masking requirement.

More information at:

Visit: co.benton.or.us/covid19

Call: 541-766-6120

At your service,
every day.