



NEWS RELEASE
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Local health officers to recommend new public health order requiring face masks at events with 500 or more individuals in attendance

Douglas County Commission to consider public health order during Feb. 9 meeting

LAWRENCE, KS – The Douglas County Commission will consider a new emergency public health order during its Feb. 9 meeting. The new order would require individuals to wear face coverings at indoor gatherings in which 500 or more individuals are in attendance in a single space, such as a concert, sporting event, trade show or convention.

Local health officers, with support from Douglas County Unified Command leaders, are recommending the new order specific to large crowds to help prevent spread of COVID-19 in Douglas County where cases and hospitalizations continue to be high, putting a strain on staffing in schools and the healthcare system.

As of today, 4,157 active cases have been reported in Douglas County, according to Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health. That's nearly seven times higher than one year ago when there were 612 active cases reported on Feb. 4, 2021. The 14-day moving average for new cases is at 193 cases per day, compared to 27 cases one year ago.

If approved, the public health order would start Feb. 10 and remain in effect until March 9 unless otherwise rescinded or modified by County Commissioners. The current order, that requires face masks inside all public spaces in Douglas County, would expire.

Dr. Thomas Marcellino, county health officer, and Dr. Jennifer Schrimsher, deputy county health officer and infectious disease specialist at LMH Health, continue to strongly encourage individuals to wear masks in crowded spaces to help prevent spread of COVID-19.

“Masks are a tool that we can use to help prevent spread of COVID, and it’s especially important to wear them in large crowds where people are likely coming from other communities,” Marcellino said. “We want to do everything we can to protect loved ones, our neighbors and the community at large.”

Schrimsher added, “The community’s response to last month’s health order has been amazing and also critical in helping our healthcare system weather the worst of Omicron. I do believe things will get better from here, but right now Douglas County is still very much in the thick of it.”

There are exemptions to the new public health order. These include:

- Children ages 2 and younger.

- Persons with a medical condition, mental health condition or disability that prevents wearing a face covering.
- Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Persons engaged in religious services, ceremonies or activities.
- Persons who are seated at a restaurant or other establishment that offers food or beverages while they are actively eating or drinking.
- Persons engaged in a court-related proceeding.

Commissioners will discuss the public health order during their meeting at 5:30 p.m. Feb. 9 at the County Courthouse, 1100 Massachusetts St. Those who attend at the Courthouse will be required to wear a face mask. The meeting also will be available by Zoom. For meeting information, visit the county's website: <http://dgcoks.org/commissionmeetings>.

To review the full emergency public health order and Douglas County COVID information, visit: douglascountyks.org/coronavirus.