

Jon Doemel, County Executive
Doug Gieryn, Director/Health Officer

Office Hours: M-F 8:00am-4:30pm
Toll-Free: 800-250-3110
Fax: 920-232-3370

health@co.winnebago.wi.us
www.winnebagohealth.org



112 Otter Avenue
Oshkosh, WI 54903-2808
Phone: 920-232-3000

211 N Commercial Street
Neenah, WI 54956
Phone: 920-727-2894

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@WinnebagoHealth

Winnebago County COVID-19 Face Coverings Advisory

Updated 12/23/21

COVID-19 remains a significant threat to our community. **Winnebago County is currently experiencing the highest level of community transmission we have seen since November 2020. The large number of COVID-19 cases in our community and the rate at which they are growing puts us at a critically high burden status and activity level according to metrics established by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS).** Local health systems are at a crisis point and are severely strained due to the current spike in cases; **Fox Valley area hospitalizations are at the highest levels since November 2020.** With the highly transmissible [Omicron variant](#) spreading rapidly throughout the U.S. and Wisconsin, this is a critical time to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and maintain a level of transmission that is manageable by our healthcare and public health systems.

The Omicron variant is yet another reason to wear a mask, get vaccinated, and get a booster if you are eligible. At this time, among Winnebago County residents, 58% have completed the initial vaccine series, 24% have received a booster dose or 3rd dose, and 13% of children ages 5-11 have completed the initial vaccine series. Booster doses are important in decreasing the likelihood of infection and severe outcomes, particularly as the Omicron variant spreads.

With the anticipated surge in cases due to the Omicron variant, it is advised that everyone two years and older, regardless of vaccination status, wear a face mask in public indoor setting, crowded outdoor venues and at gatherings with people outside of your household. Evidence shows face coverings help prevent people who have COVID-19 from spreading the virus to others.

The Winnebago County Health Department (WCHD) issues the following advisory to control the transmission of COVID-19 throughout our communities, effective immediately.

All people 2 years of age and older should wear a face covering that covers their nose and mouth when:

- Inside public enclosed spaces, including businesses, healthcare settings, workplaces, waiting in line, and on public transportation
- Gathering with individuals who do not live in the same household, especially when social distancing of six (6) feet cannot be maintained
- Outdoors if social distancing of six (6) feet cannot be maintained where people who do not live in the same household are present

Individuals may occasionally need to remove a face covering:

- While eating or drinking
- When communicating with an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing and communication cannot be achieved through other means
- While obtaining a service that requires the temporary removal of the face covering
- When necessary to confirm the individual's identity

- While sleeping
- While swimming or on duty as a lifeguard
- When engaging in work where a face covering would create a risk to the individual, as determined by government safety guidelines.
- When federal or state law prohibits wearing a face covering

Cloth face coverings should not be placed on:

- Children under the age of two
- Anyone who has trouble breathing
- Anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance
- Anyone who has a medical condition, intellectual or developmental disability, mental health conditions, or other sensory sensitivities that prevent them from wearing a face covering.
- Anyone in a situation that could lead to a medical emergency or introduce significant safety concerns from wearing a cloth face covering, such as engaging in water activities, high intensity activities or work settings where face covering may increase the chance of heat-related illness or introduce a hazard.

People should assume others have valid reasons for not wearing a face covering. While the majority of people are able to wear cloth face coverings, some people may not be able to due to a medical condition, mental condition, or disability. Additionally, some people of color in the U.S. have experienced harassment and racism due to wearing a face covering in public. This recommendation should not be used as a justification to harass or harm another person who is either wearing or not wearing a face covering.

Please visit the CDC's webpage and WI DHS' webpage for more information on face coverings:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/mask.htm>

General Guidance for Everyone

- [Get vaccinated](#) as soon as possible and get your booster as soon as you are eligible.
- Get tested if experiencing [COVID-19 symptoms](#) or if you have been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
- Stay home if you are sick and seek appropriate medical care.
- Practice social distancing and protective measures, including the following:
 - Maintain social distancing of six (6) feet or more between people not residing in a single living unit or household;
 - Minimize time spent with anyone outside your immediate household;
 - Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as frequently as possible or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol;
 - Cover coughs or sneezes (into the sleeve or elbow, not hands) and then handwash or sanitize;
 - Regularly disinfect high-touch surfaces and objects;
 - Avoid handshaking and hugging;
 - Wear a mask anytime you are indoors and not at home, and when in close proximity to others when outside. Masks should be tight fitting and multi-layered.
 - Limit travel to reduce the potential for virus transmission;
 - Monitor yourself for [symptoms of COVID-19](#); if you develop symptoms, get tested and isolate until you receive your test results;

- Follow all other public health recommendations issued by the State of Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Winnebago County Health Department, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

WCHD recognizes this situation will continue to evolve and may require future recommendations to protect the public's health and safety. In making those decisions, WCHD will be guided by the following principles:

- Protecting public health and safety are our primary responsibility.
- Continuation and resumption of business and personal activity is essential to the well-being of our community.
- Scientific data and local information must guide our public health decision-making.
- Any recommendations issued will strive to avoid inequity amongst the individuals, businesses, and communities impacted.
- Gathering perspectives from local stakeholders is valuable.
- We trust that residents and businesses will follow recommendations and guidance from Public Health authorities to protect each other.

Please see the Winnebago County Health Department website at www.winnebagopublichealth.org for the most up-to-date guidance and resources. To find a vaccination location, visit www.wcvaccine.org.

Thank you for your commitment to keeping our communities safe. Your efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19 are greatly appreciated by those who live, work, and play in Winnebago County.