



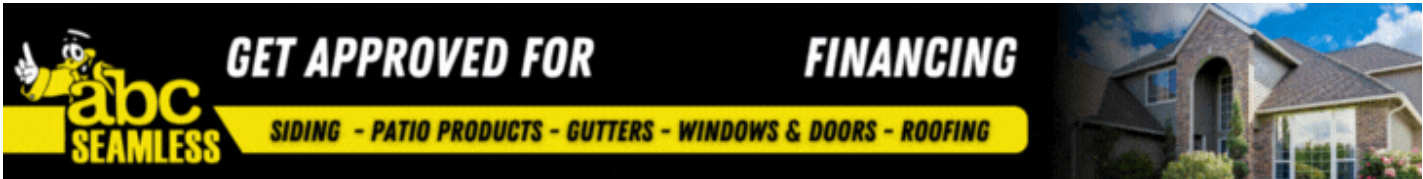
Lancaster County mask mandate set to expire on December 23rd

Lancaster's risk dial will remain in elevated orange.

December 21, 2021 3:48 pm by Nolan Dorn (<https://www.kikntv.com/bios/nolan-dorn/>), Anahita Martinez (<https://www.kkmtv.com/authors/anahita-martinez-kkmtv-com/>)

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LINCOLN, Neb. (KLKN) – The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department announced the mask mandate that is set to expire Thursday, will not be extended.

Lancaster County's COVID-19 risk dial will remain in elevated orange. LLCHD says one case of the COVID-19 Omicron variant has been reported in Lancaster County.

Health Director Pat Lopez says the COVID-19 positivity rate is still above 14%. In the month of December, 17 people have died from COVID-19.

Lopez said the decision was made to expire the mask mandate after giving people enough time to get vaccinated and to get their boosters.

The DHM that expires on Thursday originally went into effect on **August 26** (<https://www.klkntv.com/breaking-mask-mandate-to-start-thursday-in-lancaster-county/>).

“To allow everyone to get vaccinated, and for our 5 to 11-year-olds to get vaccinated as well. We’ve allowed for that in the community and we are continuing to offer those options and we need our community members to step up and do what needs to be done,” said Pat Lopez Lancaster county Health Director.

The county health department will be partnering with various entities to pull off large-scale vaccination clinics.

“Even if you’ve had COVID in the past, your natural immunity will not protect you from getting infected with Omicron. Getting vaccinated now will greatly reduce your risk of hospitalization and death,” said Lopez.

Despite having about a 14% positivity rate, hospitalizations on the rise, and 17 COVID-related deaths in December alone, Lancaster county is being recognized for its efforts to lower COVID rates.

“We have weathered the pandemic better than most. According to the John’s Hopkins Bloomberg school of public health, Lancaster county is in the lower 10 percent for mortality rates, and top third for vaccination rates when compared with hundreds of other counties across the U.S. with similar demographics,” said Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird of Lincoln.

On Tuesday, there were 126 COVID patients in county hospitals, 21 of whom were on ventilators.

“There are people in the waiting room, in the emergency department waiting for a bed,” said Lopez.

The mayor has been in communication with Governor Pete Ricketts talking about the possibility of having the National Guard help with hospital staffing.

“Using the National Guard to especially assist us in getting long term care residents, or individuals who need long term care, out of the hospital when they no longer need hospital care. The National Guard might be a resource for staffing those facilities when that’s a problem,” said Lopez.

On Tuesday, there were 30 individuals in Lancaster county hospitals who fell under that category, which could have meant 30 available beds.

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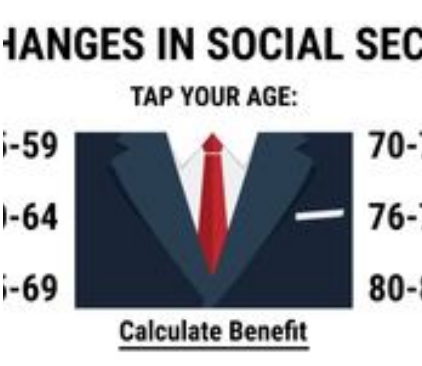
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