

Mask mandate to be lifted in Del Norte Schools

March 12, 2022



Del Norte County Public Health announced last week it was lifting mask mandates in schools beginning March 12.

The move was the third time in a month that mask mandates have been eased as the threat of COVID-19 continues to ease in the county.

On Feb. 16, California and Del Norte County lifted the indoor mask mandate for vaccinated people, but the masking requirement remained in effect for those not vaccinated as well as those in schools.

On March 1, California eased the mandate even more, with the unvaccinated no longer required to wear masks indoors. Last week, Dr. Aaron Stutz, the county's public health officer, announced the mask mandate in schools would come to an end March 12, meaning when students return to school Monday, masks will be optional but not required.

"Our goal at Del Norte County Public Health has always been to keep our community safe and healthy," the health department wrote in a letter to the community. "We know masks aren't always comfortable, but to

keep our county safe, we continue to recommend masking, especially in times of high transmission in our community."

Even with the easing mandates, masks will still be required in public transit, healthcare settings, emergency shelters, correctional facilities, homeless shelters and long-term care facilities.

At Del Norte County schools, the school board voted 3-2 to retain the mask requirement until March 14, but changed the policy from exclusion to education. Superintendent Jeff Harris explained that the vote means students are still required to wear masks. Those who choose not to wear a mask will be offered one in class. Those who refuse, can stay in class, but information will be sent home to their family notifying them that their child refused to wear a mask.

Beginning March 14, the district's policy will change with the district recommending students wear masks, but the mandate will be fully removed.

Harris said he understands some families will be concerned about sending students to school without masks. If you have concerns, Harris said you can reach out to your child's school or the district office at 464-6141.

"Thank you, in advance, for supporting our students and our staff as we navigate this transition," Harris said. "We all look forward to classrooms and interactions that help all of our students feel better connected and engaged."