

Mask mandate to remain in Del Norte County

November 5, 2021



The Del Norte County mask mandate will remain in effect until COVID-19 numbers decrease enough to put the county within the orange tier, though the county's public health officer endorsed upcoming holiday events and said recreational swim time at the Fred Endert Municipal Pool will be considered.

On Nov. 1, Public Health Official Dr. Aaron Stutz spoke before the Crescent City City Council, saying "I decided not to do away with it immediately, mostly because in looking at our previous numbers from last year, we had a significant increase in the number of cases - probably due to the change in weather," he said. "So, I'd like to extend the mask mandate just a little bit further into the holiday season."

For the week prior, Stutz said Del Norte County experienced 53 active cases of COVID, with 12 of those happening over the weekend of Oct. 30.

On average, there have been 4.5 daily cases of COVID, and two people were hospitalized at Sutter Coast Hospital on Nov. 1.

Stutz expressed concern about the impact the virus has had on the younger population, citing 50% of new cases in individuals under the age of 20, and 70% under the age of 49 since the pandemic began.

“At least one-fifth of the individuals have been younger than 17,” Stutz said.

The Food and Drug Administration recently approved the Pfizer vaccine, at least for emergency use, for ages 5-11. According to Stutz, orders for those vaccines went out a couple of weeks ago and should be available soon.

“Are you aware of how long it will take for the vaccine to go from emergency status to a generally-approved vaccine?” asked Councilmember Ray Altman.

“We had emergency use for adults last November or December, and that took probably six months before it was approved by the FDA,” Stutz responded. “I would expect it to be something like that, although I feel like it will be a little quicker.”

Currently, vaccination rates of those eligible to receive it are a little over 50 percent. Another 6.7 percent in the county are partially vaccinated.

“So, that’s good,” Stutz said.

However, Stutz said that he would like to see at least 55% of Del Norte County be vaccinated before making changes to the mask requirement, which according to him can be achieved if individuals who have had one shot go in for their second.

Vaccination rates are one of three criteria Stutz said is being used to determine whether Del Norte Public Health will loosen mask mandates any time soon. The other two are transmission levels according to the Centers for Disease Control and the impact of COVID patients on Sutter Coast Hospital.

“We were briefly in orange a couple of weeks ago, then we went right back into the red tier,” Stutz said.

In the red tier, most businesses, including restaurants, are allowed to open for indoor service but the number of people allowed in businesses is limited.

“I recognize that that number for us can easily shift around because of our small population, so that’s one of the less important metrics for me,” said Stutz. “Personally, I’d just be happy for us to be in the orange tier for several weeks.”

On the upside, open swim sessions at the Fred Endert Municipal Pool are being explored, and the outdoor Crescent City Light Parade and events at the cultural center will proceed as planned.

Currently, the pool is open for scheduled classes and lap swims, but is closed for family and recreational two-hour “free time” sessions that draw anywhere from 30-45 people.

The pool measures about 75 feet by 50 feet, and is indoors.

“My initial inclination in this environment is that even if we are in the red, it's looking pretty good,” Stutz said. “I have not heard that pools have significant spreading events. Can I talk to the health officer and see what they say?”

“Absolutely,” responded City Manager Eric Wier. “We will lean on your expertise.”