

Del Norte County to lift mask mandate February 15

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Beginning February 15, face coverings will no longer be required in most cases in Del Norte County.

Public Health Officer Dr. Aaron Stutz told the city council of Crescent City cases were starting to decline and he was going to align local health orders with the state orders.

Earlier this week, California officials announced its order requiring face masks indoors would be lifted February 15.

Stutz told the council with the state order being lifted, local orders regarding COVID restrictions would take place.

“It will be rescinded and we will revert to the rules that were in place,” Stutz told the council. “I will be modifying our own official covering orders to align with that date. That will mean you will no longer have to wear a mask in public.”

The exception will remain in healthcare facilities as well as in public transit.

Stutz told the council there were 270 active cases in Del Norte County with seven COVID patients in the hospital and one in ICU.

“The state has seen significant improvement from last week and the week before,” Stutz said. “We’ve never had too many hospitalizations from this current surge. However, I did work in the ER last weekend and we had a number of COVID cases in the emergency department. Right now, I think we just peaked late last week in our active cases and those active cases are trending down this week.”

Stutz told the council he has worked closely with Del Norte schools during Omicron, and due to the lighter symptoms, new rules allowed more students to be in class.

“We’re in pretty regular communication with the school superintendent,” Stutz said. “It’s almost like a group investigation strategy that’s new with the Omicron surge. It’s a little easier to get kids back to school. It’s because of the Omicron surge and it’s much less dangerous.”

While Del Norte County has often been behind the wave in California with cases going up later than other places and going down later, as well. But Stutz said it appears the Omicron surge has peaked locally with cases starting to slide.

“If you look at the graph on our website, you can see it appears we peaked last week,” he said. “Fortunately, that really hasn’t come with hospitalizations. If you look at our surge with Delta, we had 20 or 30 hospitalizations. This time, it has been around seven.”

Stutz also admitted the state data is not as accurate as it was with previous surges due to the increase in at-home tests. Due to the decrease in cases and the less deadly version of Omicron, Stutz said he was comfortable lifting many local restrictions.

“Hopefully we will be doing away with a lot of these restrictions and things,” Stutz said.

After hearing from the public health official, the council agreed to let its order to meet virtually expire this month, with in-person council meetings beginning again in March.

“Given where we are and the trend we’re heading in, I think we’re going in the right direction,” Councilor Blake Inscore said. “I think at our first meeting in March we can all be together and be together without masks.”