

## FAQ– SJBPH Public Health Advisory to Limit the Spread of COVID-19

### What is a Public Health Advisory?

A Public Health Advisory is a formal set of strong recommendations (directives) provided to a community containing well-documented prevention precautions to keep a community safe from an established public health risk. The Advisory is targeted to both businesses and the general public.

### When does this Advisory take effect?

San Juan Basin Public Health has had a local Public Health Advisory in effect since spring of 2021. The version enacted on March 1, 2022 includes the most up-to-date information to keep the community safe and healthy.

### Why is there a Public Health Advisory in place?

Severe and highly transmissible variants of COVID-19 are present in Archuleta and La Plata counties. San Juan Basin Public Health (SJBPH) continues to strongly urge residents to protect themselves through a Public Health Advisory, based on Centers for Disease Control’s “COVID-19 Community Levels.” The Public Health Advisory can be viewed [here](#).

There is still significant risk of contracting COVID-19, especially when participating in indoor activities outside of the home. Residents and business owners who commit to following San Juan Basin Public Health’s local Public Health Advisory increase their likelihood of staying safe and healthy. This FAQ is written to help you easily understand and follow the current set of strong recommendations in the advisory.

### How are community COVID-19 levels measured?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its classification system to evaluate COVID-19 Community Levels as low, medium, or high. This metric looks not only at community transmission levels, but also takes into account the percent of hospital beds available in our region and the number of hospital admissions.

Higher burden on a healthcare system is linked to a higher risk of mortality from COVID-19 and limits resources for non-COVID-19 patients. The new classification for COVID-19 Community Levels provides a more comprehensive lens to assess community levels, to inform public health recommendations and decisions about COVID-19 prevention strategies. This limits the strain on the healthcare system and ensures that resources are available for any individuals who have a health concern that requires medical care. **You can view more on COVID-19 Community Levels and check county information [here](#).**

## How can I use information about the COVID-19 Community Levels? What preventative steps should I take to limit the risk of COVID-19 transmission?

Recommendations for COVID-19 prevention are based on the current COVID-19 Community Levels, as classified by the CDC. SJBPH will continue to monitor the classification of community levels in our region and will advise the public if additional preventative measures are recommended.

You can view more on COVID-19 Community Levels and check county information [here](#).

### SJBPH and CDC recommendations for COVID-19 Community Levels include:

- **Low:**
  - At all COVID-19 Community Levels, community members should:
    - Stay up to date with [COVID-19 vaccines and boosters](#)
    - Increase ventilation throughout indoor spaces
    - Follow guidelines for [isolation and quarantine](#), including [getting tested](#) if exposed to COVID-19 or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19
  - People who have high risk for COVID-19, including those who are immunocompromised, or who live with a person who is vulnerable may consider wearing a mask in public indoor spaces. People who have high risk for COVID-19 should speak with their primary care provider to discuss what additional preventative steps are needed.
- **Medium:**
  - In addition to the preventative measures kept in place at low levels, people who have high risk for COVID-19, including those who are immunocompromised, or who live with a person who is vulnerable should wear a mask in public indoor spaces.
- **High:**
  - Community members should wear a well-fitting mask in public, regardless of vaccination status.
  - Those at higher risk should consider wearing an N-95 or KN-95 mask and should limit non-essential indoor activities.

Find out more details about current levels: [Archuleta County](#) and [La Plata County](#).

## Vaccination and Treatments

### **Am I eligible for a booster shot?**

There is strong evidence showing that booster shots provide significantly increased protection against the Omicron variant and the BA2 strain, which is dominant in Colorado.

Booster vaccines are authorized and recommended for:

- People aged 5 to 17: should obtain a Pfizer booster at least five months after finishing their original two-shot series. Youth ages 5 to 17 are only eligible for the Pfizer vaccine.
- People over the age of 18: should get a booster five months after the second dose of Moderna or Pfizer, and at least two months after the first shot for Johnson & Johnson.
- People 50 and should receive a second booster at least four months after their first booster dose.
- People over the age of 12 who are moderately or severely immunocompromised should receive a total of 5 doses of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine to stay up to date (or 4 doses for those who were initially vaccinated with the J&J vaccine series). Youth ages 5 to 17 are only eligible for the Pfizer vaccine.
- To calculate the recommended number of doses for you, you can use the [dose calculator](#) from CDPHE.

Read more about booster eligibility and schedule your next dose [here](#).

### **Will I be required to get vaccinated for work?**

Federal regulations require healthcare workers at a facility that receives Medicare or Medicaid funding to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Vaccine requirements for federal contractors and their employees remain uncertain, as this mandate is still under legal review.

Employers have the right to require vaccination for employees, whether or not there is a federal requirement. Certain exemptions may apply. More information is available at [this link](#).

### **Can I receive monoclonal antibody treatments?**

Monoclonal antibodies are produced to recognize the COVID-19 spike protein and interfere with its ability to infect a cell. Monoclonal antibody treatments are now available in southwest Colorado. These treatments can help prevent severe illness for some people aged 12 years and older who get infected with COVID-19, have mild or moderate symptoms, and are at high risk of developing severe COVID-19 due to age or medical condition. People who meet these criteria should consult their physician for a possible referral for monoclonal antibody therapy.

Learn more about monoclonal antibodies and treatment eligibility at [this link](#).

## Face Coverings and Mitigating Transmission

### **I am vaccinated, do I need to wear a mask?**

While vaccination provides protection against COVID-19, it cannot control the spread of COVID-19 alone. A layered approach is most effective to control infection and prevent hospitalizations and death. This means wearing a mask in all public indoor spaces and businesses, getting tested if exposed, washing hands thoroughly and often, and getting fully vaccinated. Evidence continues to show that wearing a well-fitting, high-quality face covering, like a surgical mask or respirator, is associated with lower likelihood of spreading or acquiring a COVID-19 infection.

SJBPH urges vulnerable individuals and people who live with vulnerable individuals in Archuleta and La Plata counties to wear a well-fitting, high-quality face covering while in a public indoor space with the COVID-19 Community Level is “Medium” or “High”, unless the individual cannot medically tolerate a face covering or is two years or younger.

SJBPH emphasizes that people should continue to follow masking requirements outlined in isolation and quarantine guidelines, found [here](#).

All individuals in La Plata and Archuleta counties are reminded that at all “community levels,” people can wear a mask based on personal preference. High quality masks are available free of charge at SJBPH’s offices in Durango and Pagosa Springs.

Federal mask requirements for public transit, air travel, and other modes of transportation, including taxis and private ride-share services like Lyft and Uber, are in effect. To learn more, visit this [link](#).

### **What else can I do to limit spread other than masking in public indoor spaces?**

SJBPH is urging all community members to continue following critical public health precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Learn more about COVID-19 prevention [here](#).

- Practice proper hand hygiene (wash hands for a minimum of 20 seconds.)
- Get vaccinated!
- Get tested if you have any concern about a COVID-19 exposure. If you are unvaccinated, consider regular testing or surveillance testing.
- Quarantine and monitor symptoms if exposure is suspected.
- If gathering with friends and family, meet outdoors when possible.
- If community levels are “High”, practice social distancing when in a public space (stay 6 feet from others).

When community levels are “High”, SJBPH advises residents and visitors to only patronize indoor establishments and special events that adhere to the face covering and physical distancing recommendations in the Public Health Advisory; these places pose less of a risk than places that do not require face coverings or limit capacity to support physical distancing.

## Business Owners

### **How can my business follow the Advisory and help keep the community safe?**

Owners, operators, or managers of businesses and other public indoor settings should follow COVID-19 Community Levels and adjust business practices to align with recommendations for the current level. SJBPH advises that business organizations, public institutions and special events should consider requiring employees, customers and/or guests to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, or to require a recent (less than 48 hours) negative test to be presented on entry. Widespread vaccination combined with other mitigation strategies continues to be the best approach to reduce the burden of disease in our community.

### **What steps should I take to keep my employees safe and prevent a COVID-19 outbreak in my workplace?**

SJBPH advises employers and business and event operators to implement the following transmission control measures in public indoor spaces:

- Monitor symptoms in employees at work or at home prior to work.
- Encourage testing among staff and vaccination among staff.
- If an employee reports COVID-19 symptoms or tests positive, take the following steps:
  - Send employee home immediately. Instruct employee to get tested if they have not done so already.
  - Follow SJBPH guidance for quarantine and isolation, ensuring that the employee does not return to work until the quarantine or isolation period has ended. Learn more [here](#).
  - If five or more employees have COVID-19 symptoms, contact SJBPH and cooperate with outbreak investigators.
  - Provide work arrangements for people at risk of severe COVID-19 sickness, such as telecommuting, until they are fully immunized. When possible, encourage and enable remote work.
- When community levels are “Medium” or “High”, consider enabling remote work options.
- Consider requiring employees and customers to wear a well-fitting, high-quality face covering, especially if the establishment or an event is poorly ventilated and/or the community level in the county of the facility or event is “High”.

All employers in the state, regardless of size, are required to provide a supplement of up to 80 hours of COVID-related leave in 2021, including paid sick leave for getting the COVID-19 vaccine and recovering from side effects that prevent an employee from working. More information on this requirement is available at [this link](#). The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) provides employers with mitigation support in further detail via [this link](#).