

Exeter Health Resources' Position on Required Indoor Masking as of 2/3/2022:

NH's State wide numbers related to community spread are beginning to improve. However they remain significantly higher than the thresholds that would indicate we have the pandemic under local control. The best way to continue this positive trend and eventually get to a level of significantly reduced risk of community spread is to continue to pursue the active measures that have been working, including; indoor mask utilization, increasing the number of people fully vaccinated and boosted, maintaining social distancing precautions, washing hands and staying home when sick or potentially exposed to someone with COVID. There is a preponderance of evidence that supports mask wearing as an effective intervention and unambiguous guidance by the CDC which recommends universal indoor masking, including in schools. CDC and DHHS will not likely change their mask guidance until we see community spread drop from its current level which remains high to below moderate.

With over 40% of New Hampshire residents still not fully vaccinated the risk of significant illness and death is still very high. NH's 7 day average test positivity rate has now fallen below 15% which is down significantly, but remains almost 3 times higher than the level of pandemic control. We are still seeing an average of approximately 1,300 new cases every day and over 400 patients remain in hospitals across the state due to COVID (active and recovering) at the end of January and our Seacoast hospitals remain extremely full. If we relax our active measures to reduce the spread of the virus, we run the risk that we will see our numbers climb again as originally projected, dragging out the pandemic and its associated impacts even longer.

Therefore, the Leadership of Exeter Hospital, Core Physicians and Rockingham VNA and Hospice, in alignment with current CDC guidelines, strongly recommend that all towns, municipalities, schools and businesses in New Hampshire continue to support indoor mask utilization. Current circumstances facing all New Hampshire communities demonstrate that without continually taking steps to slow the rate of infections we will experience ongoing risks for all residents needing to access health care services and a prolonging of the impact of the COVID pandemic has on our patients, our health systems, our community, our children and our economy. Mask use has been shown to significantly reduce the risk of spreading COVID to others (which can happen even if the wearer does not have symptoms), and will help reduce the risk of the wearer contracting the virus as well. The only way for this effort to be fully effective is if everyone is wearing masks in settings where it is impossible or impractical to maintain safe social distance.

We will continually monitor current conditions in our State and our region as well as changes to State and CDC guidelines. We will update our position when appropriate and supported by scientific consensus.