



Rhode Island Masking FAQs

July 13, 2021

What are current masking requirements?

Although Rhode Island no longer requires masks, Rhode Island residents must follow federal masking laws and regulations. Whether or not you're vaccinated, federal law still requires you to [wear a mask](#)¹:

- On public transportation like planes, buses, trains, and boats
- When providing or using paid ground transportation services
- At transportation hubs like airports, train and bus stations
- In enclosed or semi-enclosed transit stops and waiting areas
- If working in a healthcare setting where suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients are treated
- When required by other federal laws or regulations

A business establishment, school, camp, healthcare setting, organization, or other entity can create its own masking policies and require you to wear a mask whether or not you're fully vaccinated.

What does it mean to be fully vaccinated?

Fully vaccinated means you've gotten all recommended doses of a COVID-19 vaccine authorized by the United States (US) Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or World Health Organization (WHO) and more than 14 days have passed since the final dose.

What if I'm not fully vaccinated?

To best protect others, the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) recommends that you continue to wear a mask outdoors in crowded settings and indoors near unvaccinated people you don't live with. RIDOH also recommends that you continue to stay at least three feet apart from unvaccinated people you don't live with.

Can I still catch and transmit COVID-19 if I'm fully vaccinated?

If you're fully vaccinated, there's a very small chance you can still catch COVID-19 and an even smaller chance you can transmit it.

What's considered a healthcare setting?

A healthcare setting is any place where healthcare is provided. This includes but is not limited to acute care facilities (such as hospitals, urgent care centers, emergency departments, etc.), extended stay rehabilitation facilities, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, home-based healthcare, vehicles where healthcare is delivered (such as mobile clinics), and outpatient facilities such as dialysis centers, physician offices, and others.

¹ There are exceptions to these requirements under certain circumstances.

Do I need to carry proof of vaccination with me?

No, but businesses, organizations, and other entities may require you to show proof of vaccination. For this reason, it's a good idea to carry official proof you are fully vaccinated.

What type of vaccination proof should I show to businesses or accept from customers?

You may choose to carry a physical or digital copy of your vaccination record in case you are asked to show evidence of vaccination. The official COVID-19 vaccination verification documents available in Rhode Island at this time are:

- Your COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card
- A printed or digital photo of the front and back of your COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card
- A printed copy or screenshot of your COVID-19 vaccination record page from Rhode Island's Vaccine Record Lookup Portal at portal.ri.gov/VaccineRecord

I run a business. Do I have to require proof of vaccination of my customers?

No, but you can choose to implement it as a policy. If you would like to require proof of vaccination from customers or employees but are unsure about any legal issues, please consult with your legal team. Businesses may also choose to seek guidance from their merchants' association, chamber of commerce, or industry association.

Does requiring proof of vaccination violate the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule?

No. HIPAA prohibits health plans, healthcare clearinghouses, and healthcare providers that electronically transmit any health information related to transactions for which HHS has adopted standards from releasing personal health information to third parties.

I run a business. What do current masking laws mean for my employees and customers who are fully vaccinated and for those who are not fully vaccinated?

As a business owner, you can require employees and customers to wear masks and physically distance while at your place of business whether or not they're fully vaccinated.

Do I still have to wear a mask outdoors?

No, except when required by federal law or by a business establishment, organization, or other entity. Unvaccinated people are still strongly encouraged to wear masks in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated. This applies to all ages and settings, including outdoor live performances, youth sports, and summer camps.

What is considered close contact?

Close contact means you've been within six feet of someone with COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period.

Does wearing a mask help prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Yes, wearing a mask helps prevent the spread of COVID-19. Mask wearing may be especially effective at preventing COVID-19 transmission in indoor and enclosed settings where air circulation and ventilation are limited and air droplets carrying the virus can hang in the air, thereby increasing the risk of transmission.

Do masks limit oxygen intake by people exerting energy, like those playing a sport?

Studies on the effects of wearing masks have shown there is no change in oxygen or carbon dioxide levels when people wear cloth and surgical masks while resting and exercising. The studies included healthy hospital workers, older adults, and adults with COPD. Although sometimes uncomfortable, masks were found to be safe even when exercising.

Is there a risk to wearing a mask and playing sports in the heat?

Some people may report feeling increased shortness of breath or claustrophobic while exercising with a mask in the heat. Coaches and athletes should consider modifying the intensity of their exercise when masked, particularly in the heat. Heat health warnings may be an important tool, along with athletes and coaches being alert for signs of heat-related illness.

Is wearing a mask dangerous to a child's health?

If you have concerns about whether masking may negatively affect your child's health, check in with your pediatrician or primary care provider. Masks should not be worn by children younger than age two, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is unable to remove the mask without help.

Do unvaccinated children really pose a health risk to others if they are not wearing masks?

Yes, unvaccinated children are at risk for getting COVID-19 and transmitting it to others who come in close contact with them, including people who may be more vulnerable to severe disease. Wearing a mask and physical distancing both reduce the risk of transmission.

Should children still wear masks at school or camp?

The CDC recommends that schools and other settings focused on children continue to follow masking guidelines. This is primarily because most children age 12-15 are not yet fully vaccinated and children younger than age 12 cannot yet be vaccinated. These groups are still at risk for getting and transmitting COVID-19 to others, including those who may be more vulnerable to severe disease.