

Making sense of the CDC's new COVID guidance

Work used to be something you got paid to do *and* the place where you did it. That changed almost two years ago to the day. Maybe, according to the Centers for Disease Control's new standards for measuring covid, we can get back to work—both the verb and the noun.

The CDC is shifting from eliminating the virus to a new metric called [Community Levels](#). The idea is to take precautions to protect yourself, employees and others from the virus based on the virus' presence in your community. This in turn will help you set a viable return-to-work date and allow you to assess whether a new variant is virulent enough to require you to reactivate your work from home protocols.

New CDC guidelines: Gotta live with it

The CDC's new covid guidance basically takes us from pandemic to endemic. The flu, for example, is endemic. It's always there, hovering in the background. We live with it.

The Community Levels tool helps communities decide what preventative steps to take based on the latest data. It's flexible: Levels can be low, medium, or high and are determined by looking at hospital beds occupied, hospital admissions, and the total number of new covid cases in an area.

- **Low level:** The CDC recommends you stay up-to-date with your shots and get tested if you have symptoms.
- **Medium level:** The CDC recommends talking to your healthcare provider about whether you need to wear a mask and take other precautions if you're at high risk for severe illness. In addition, it recommends staying up-to-date with your shots and getting tested if you have symptoms
- **High level:** The CDC recommends wearing a mask indoors in public places, staying up-to-date with your shots, getting tested if you have symptoms, and taking additional precautions if you're at high risk for severe illness.

You can go to the CDC's [website](#), punch in your state and county and see where it falls on the low-to-high continuum.

Consider the following steps if your county looks good enough to consider reopening:

- Don't expect employees to come in tomorrow. Set a reopening date far enough in advance so employees have time to make child-care or pet-sitting arrangements.
- Consider a staggered reopening.
- If you've promised employees they can work from home forever, survey them to see if they've changed their minds.
- If you're allowing employees to work under a hybrid arrangement, have their managers iron out the

details and get everything in writing.

- Stress to employees it's safe to come back and highlight any changes to the workplace.

Bye-bye masks

Because so many people are either vaccinated or have developed some degree of natural immunity from contracting the virus, mask mandates for vaccinated people are lifting or have already been lifted in most settings, including office settings, around the country. Here are the most recent states to drop their mask mandates:

- [California](#)
- [Connecticut](#)
- [Delaware](#)
- [Illinois](#)
- [Massachusetts](#)
- [Nevada](#)
- [New Jersey](#)
- [New York](#)
- [Oregon](#)
- [Rhode Island](#)
- [Washington](#)

Unvaccinated employees should still be required to wear masks in the office. Other employees, of course, may choose to continue to wear them. Employees who are immunocompromised or who have children who are too young to be vaccinated may have to wear them. No employee should be ridiculed for their choices.