

FACE MASKS REQUIRED EFFECTIVE AUGUST 13

(Versión en español sigue abajo)

Due to the spike in COVID-19 hospitalizations being driven by the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant, Governor Brown announced a mandate requiring face masks/coverings statewide at all indoor public gatherings beginning August 13, 2021. **Effective this Friday, face masks are required for all adults and children older than 5 gathered in all Catholic Churches in the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon.**

The use of face masks is required for all indoor faith gatherings and meetings. Social distancing and capacity limits are not currently in effect. Link to the Governor's Mask Requirement fact sheet [HERE](#). Link to the Oregon Health Authority rule on mandatory mask wearing in all indoor spaces [HERE](#).

The Archdiocesan COVID-19 Response team has consulted with faithful Catholic medical experts who have confirmed the contagious nature of the Delta variant and the dire situation of our hospital systems in Oregon. In charity, we must do our part to help stop the spread of this dangerous variant.

The pandemic has caused a strain on all of us. Restrictions and vaccinations are not 100% effective against the virus, but we have a pastoral responsibility to attempt to mitigate the risks for parishioners and school families. Thank you for your understanding and good will.

Please contact Todd Cooper, Chair of the COVID-19 Task Force at tcooper@archdpdx.org or 503-233-8386 with questions.

MULTNOMAH COUNTY PARISHES

On Monday, August 9, Chair Deborah Kafoury announced her intention to issue a county-wide executive order legally requiring the use of masks in indoor public spaces, regardless of vaccination status for all people 5 years and older (2 years and older if tolerated) beginning August 13. This includes church services and other indoor faith-based gatherings. She also announced there would be enforcement of the order that will be complaint-driven and may result in a fine of up to \$1000 per violation. In light of this order, Multnomah County parishes are asked to follow the same liturgical protocols we have outlined for all parishes under the state mask mandate. The county order and additional information can be found here: [August 2021 Mask Mandate | Multnomah County \(multco.us\)](#).

LITURGICAL PROTOCOLS

UPDATE, AUGUST, 13, 2021: At every entrance, parishes *must* post signs that face coverings are required. Link to printable sign [HERE](#). Parishes are asked to

assign greeters who can remind churchgoers about the mask requirements. To the extent possible, parishes should provide masks to churchgoers who don't have them.

Please keep in mind that charity should prevail regarding use of masks. Confrontations about the mask mandate should be entirely avoided. As the Governor has stressed, the emphasis of the indoor mask requirement is on personal responsibility. Oregonians are asked to make a commitment to protect those around them by wearing a mask.

“Common sense exemptions” to the mask mandate are allowed for certain activities. This would include the presider at certain points during Holy Mass and the faithful during the moment they receive Holy Communion. Exceptions are also made for people with disabilities and children 5 years and under.

Those who have legitimate medical reasons for not wearing masks should not be denied entrance into church or access to the Holy Eucharist. Every effort should be made to accommodate the individual(s) in a separate seating area such as a cry room or unused choir area away from the congregation.

Presiders must use masks to the extent possible while celebrating Holy Mass
Deacons must use masks to the extent possible while assisting at Holy Mass
Ministers of Holy Communion must use masks while distributing the Holy Eucharist.
Cantors and choir members may remove masks when leading the singing at Holy Mass.

Lectors may remove masks while proclaiming the Word.

Altar servers and other liturgical ministers should be masked while performing their duties.

MASS OBLIGATION REMAINS IN PLACE

The obligation to attend Holy Mass remains in place. The usual factors which may excuse a member of the faithful from attending Mass on days of obligation also remain in place. For example, those ordinarily excused might include: the sick, their caretakers, and anyone with serious health concerns or grave fear of illness which necessitates avoiding large public gatherings. Such persons, nonetheless, should devote themselves to prayer for a suitable time.

In other cases, the faithful are reminded that, for a just cause, the pastor of a parish can dispense the faithful of the parish and anyone present in the parish from the obligation to participate in the Mass in individual cases or may commute the obligation to some other pious work.

STATEMENT REGARDS VACCINE MANDATES

August 30, 2021

The COVID-19 virus has surged once again with the rapid spread of the Delta variant, which is dramatically more contagious than the original virus. The pandemic and its effects have impacted the entire globe and laid a heavy burden on all of us, including our families and communities here in western Oregon. We continue to implore the Lord for his mercy and a rapid end to the pandemic.

Now that the Pfizer vaccine is fully approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the State of Oregon is requiring all school teachers, staff, and volunteers, including in private schools, to be vaccinated against COVID-19 by Oct. 18 (see rule [HERE](#)). It is important to recall that statewide vaccine mandates for other vaccinations already exist for all children who attend schools.

Catholic Church leaders encourage all people who are able to get vaccinated to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Please see this [VIDEO](#), which features Pope Francis and the President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop José Gomez. Pope Francis, Pope Benedict, and our own Archbishop Sample have all received the vaccine. In recommending the vaccine, the Church relies on the judgement of public health experts regarding its safety and efficacy. No medical intervention is without risks, and these risks must be weighed in light of the benefits of vaccination for the individual and common good.

Receiving any of the currently approved COVID-19 vaccines is morally acceptable for Catholics in light of the pandemic and since ethically irreproachable COVID-19 vaccines are unavailable. Because receiving the vaccine constitutes only remote, passive material cooperation in evil, the Church teaches it is morally licit to do so ([CDF 2 & 3](#)). A Catholic, in good conscience, can receive any of the three currently available COVID-19 vaccines. Since this position that one can in good conscience receive the vaccination has been confirmed by recent statements by the Holy Father and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, this is to be considered an authoritative application of the Church's moral norms in this particular case and constitutes a part of the Magisterial teaching of the Church.

The Church recognizes that in principle, vaccination is not a moral obligation and must be voluntary (**CDF, 5**). However, because the State is requiring vaccination for some sectors of society, (including Catholic school teachers, staff, and volunteers) due to the pandemic and for the stated purpose of protecting the public health, Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Portland are therefore obligated to comply with the State's vaccine mandate. The Church recognizes and understands there are legitimate medical and other reasons why individuals may not be able or willing to take the vaccines. For example, the Church supports individuals who, not accepting the Church's official moral guidance, are disturbed in conscience about taking the vaccines due to their remote connection with aborted fetal cell lines. Individuals not able or unwilling to be vaccinated must take concrete, practical steps to avoid exposing those who are vulnerable and at risk. In cases where accommodations cannot be made by an employer, the individual may need to seek employment elsewhere to protect the common good and minimize risks to vulnerable populations.

In the case of Catholic school teachers, staff and volunteers, there may be circumstances when accommodations can be made for an individual seeking an exemption of conscience. Each request for such an accommodation will be carefully and sincerely considered on its merits and on an individual basis. Minimizing risk for our children and keeping them safe is paramount. The Oregon Health Authority form must be used to request a religious exception.

No letters can be written by priests or other Church officials to support an individual's request for religious exemption. This is because the matter is strictly between the employee and the employer. Also, no Church official can state that receiving the vaccination is contrary to the moral teachings of the Church, given the moral guidance provided by the Church as referenced above. Individuals can be directed to use National Catholic Bioethics Center materials as a reference to craft their own letters of conscientious objection.