



August 3, 2021

King County EMS: Updated Masking Policy

Background: The prevalence of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) continues to increase in King County as a consequence of the emergence of the highly infectious delta variant, which is now the predominant strain of COVID in King County and around the United States. The delta strain is many times more contagious than the original form of SARS CoV-2.

The vaccine fortunately protects against the delta strain. The rate of infection continues to be more than 10-fold greater among unvaccinated individuals. Yet vaccinated persons can still contract and spread the delta variant of COVID. The potential for spread to unvaccinated persons is especially concerning given that these individuals are at much higher risk for serious illness and hospitalization, even among younger persons. We need to do our best to protect the EMS workforce especially unvaccinated colleagues, as we continue to discuss the balance of benefits related to more comprehensive public safety vaccination.

Update: To increase workplace safety and reduce the spread of COVID-19, masking inside the workplace (indoors) is again required for all persons *regardless of vaccination status*. Individuals shall wear a mask that covers the mouth and nose while at the work in indoor common areas. Persons should continue to mask along with other appropriate PPE when engaging in patient care.

I appreciate this is not a welcome change and will feel like is a step backward, but the reality is that such a change may prevent an exponential surge of COVID among the EMS workforce. KCEMS in conjunction with Public Health will continue to monitor the circumstances related to vaccination rates and community COVID-19 prevalence to determine if and when we can reduce the masking requirement.

Thank you.

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