



January 10, 2022

Attn: St. Mary's County Business Owners/Managers  
Re: Local COVID-19 Prevention Measures for Businesses

Ongoing surveillance of [local COVID-19 data](#)<sup>1</sup> by the St. Mary's County Health Department (SMCHD) is showing a very rapid surge in the local COVID-19 pandemic, with new case rates at their highest levels since the onset of the pandemic. This is likely fueled primarily by the Omicron variant of the virus which seems to be much more contagious compared to earlier virus variants. Omicron also is more successful at breaking through immunity from prior infection or vaccination. Those persons who are up-to-date on their COVID vaccine (full primary vaccine plus booster if eligible) are best protected against severe illness and hospitalization, even if they do get infected. Omicron thus far appears to be generally less severe than prior virus strains for those who are vaccinated (it is unknown at this time if it is generally less severe for those who are not vaccinated); however, because it is so much more contagious and is infecting more of our residents even a smaller percentage of people hospitalized is causing a bigger strain on our healthcare system than what we have experienced previously in the pandemic.

Our community really needs your help. Please take action in your businesses to protect your employees and customers from infection and severe illness. Please implement the following measures:

**1) Masking**

- a) Post visible signs requiring masking for customers and staff age 2 and older who are entering indoor spaces. Example signs are available on the [Businesses+](#) page of our website: [Masks Required](#)
- b) Make more effective masking options (such as ASTM-rated medical grade surgical masks, double masking with surgical masks, KN95, and N95) readily available to your employees, and customers if possible. SMCHD has already launched a [community distribution initiative](#) of more effective masks to increase those in our community who have ready access to more effective masks.

**2) Up-to-Date COVID-19 vaccination**

- a) Encourage your employees to get their [COVID-19 vaccine](#) or booster if eligible. Anyone age 12 and up is eligible for a booster if they are at least 5 months after their Moderna/Pfizer primary series or 2 months after their Johnson & Johnson primary dose.
- b) Consider offering paid time off or financial incentives to help get your employees and their family members vaccinated/boosted so they are better protected against symptomatic COVID-19 illness

**3) Improve ventilation and filtration in your indoor spaces** - this is especially important in spaces such as food service facilities where people may be removing their masks to eat

- a) Keep windows open or have a regular schedule of opening windows (e.g., 10 minutes every hour) to help clear out indoor air that may be carrying aerosolized virus

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<sup>1</sup> <http://smchd.org/covid-19-data>

- b) Use HEPA air purifiers (appropriate for the square footage) to help remove circulating COVID-19 virus from your indoor spaces
- 4) **Offer telework, curbside, or delivery as feasible**
  - a) To better protect your workforce and ongoing company operations during this surge, please institute teleworking as is feasible
  - b) Change in-person meetings to virtual or postpone them
  - c) Offer curbside, outdoor, and delivery options for your customers
- 5) **Symptom screening & testing**
  - a) Have employees screen daily for symptoms of COVID-19 and encourage them to get tested for COVID-19 if they have symptoms or have had close contact with a person infected with COVID-19
  - b) Testing, including PCR testing (most reliable) and take-home rapid antigen tests are available in the community and through SMCHD - We have been working to expand access to testing and testing resources
  - c) Visit [smchd.org/covid-19-testing](https://smchd.org/covid-19-testing) for more information
- 6) **Quarantine & isolation**
  - a) SMCHD has updated its guidance for Quarantine & Isolation, available online at: [smchd.org/covid-19-quarantine-isolation](https://smchd.org/covid-19-quarantine-isolation)
  - b) Please note that newer, shorter quarantine and isolation options for those that are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic carry higher risk of spread and should involve masking with more effective masks. SMCHD also strongly recommends negative testing prior to return in the shortened isolation protocol.
- 7) **Please continue to encourage use of hand washing/hand sanitizer** and make hand sanitizer readily available for customers.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to protect our community despite these really difficult times. We are so very grateful for your actions to mitigate the impact of this pandemic. For more information and resources for local businesses related to COVID-19 (e.g., distancing strategies, environmental recommendations, etc.) please visit: [smchd.org/coronavirus](https://smchd.org/coronavirus) and click on [Businesses](https://smchd.org/coronavirus#businesses)<sup>2</sup>. Businesses may also contact our Environmental Health Division for information or guidance at (301) 475-4321 or [smchd.env@maryland.gov](mailto:smchd.env@maryland.gov).



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<sup>2</sup> <https://smchd.org/2020/03/covid-19-businesses/>