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What is the COVID-19 Transmission Index?

The COVID-19 Transmission Index is a balanced approach intended to protect individuals, communities, and businesses. The goal of this model is for each county's residents to work together at lowering their county's transmission index level, and for as many counties to be in the low level as possible.

There are three levels in the transmission index: high, moderate, and low. Each level has certain requirements for individuals and businesses to follow in order to reduce transmission of COVID-19.

What data are used to decide the transmission index?

Levels are determined by the 7-day average percent of positive tests, 14-day case rate per 100,000 people, and statewide ICU utilization. You can see the transmission index metrics here: coronavirus.utah.gov/utah-health-guidance-levels.

Counties that meet at least two criteria for high, moderate, or low will be moved to that level. For example, if a county meets the "high" level criteria for the 7-day average percent positivity, the "high" level for the 14-day case rate, and the "low" for statewide ICU utilization, the county would be in the "high" transmission index level.

Frontier counties (those with fewer than six people per square mile) with less than or equal to 14 cases in the previous 14 days will automatically be designated as "low" transmission. Frontier counties with more than 14 cases in the previous 14 days will have their transmission level determined using the standard transmission index criteria.

Transmission index criteria

- **What does 7-day average % positivity mean? Why is this important?**

This metric shows the average percent of positive laboratory results over the most recent 7-day period. This is calculated by dividing the total number of positive tests by the total number of people tested and then dividing by 7. This information helps us understand how well we are doing with testing. When the percent positivity is above 10 percent, that means we are missing sick individuals because we aren't testing enough. If it is less than 5%, we are likely capturing most folks with COVID. [Understand more about percent positivity from Johns Hopkins University](#).



- **What does a 14-day case rate per 100k mean? Why is this important?**

The two-week cumulative incidence rate summarizes new cases reported in the past 14 days per 100,000 people. An incidence rate tells us how quickly a disease is spreading in a population because it helps us compare areas with different sizes of populations as if they all had the same population. Areas with higher incidence rates have more people who are sick with COVID-19 and infectious.

- **Why do you use statewide ICU utilization and not a local area ICU utilization?**

Some local areas do not have ICUs, and will transfer sick residents out of the area to receive care. Other areas have limited ICU capacity, and likewise may transfer their sickest patients to ICUs in other areas of the state. For these reasons, looking at ICU capacity in specific geographic areas is not the best way to determine how COVID-19 is impacting ICU capacity.

When does this new change go into effect?

The COVID-19 Transmission Index is effective immediately. The previous Phased Guidelines (or color-coded restriction levels) are no longer being used.

Please refer to [State Public Health Order 2020-19](#).

Are the actions listed in the COVID-19 Transmission Index a mandate? Does the health department have legal power to enact this?

Under [Utah Code §§ 26-1-30\(3\), \(5\), \(6\)](#), and [26-6-3](#), the Utah Department of Health is required to protect the health of the people within the state and control the spread of epidemic and infectious diseases. The Utah Department of Health is given the legal power and authority to issue public health orders to fulfill these duties under [Utah Code § 26-1-10](#).

The COVID-19 Transmission Index has been approved through a State Public Health Order. This means the actions for each level of transmission risk are requirements. State and local health departments have legal power and authority to enforce these requirements.

When does a county change levels?

Changes to a county's transmission index level will occur on a seven-day cycle. The Utah Department of Health will review the data each Wednesday and announce changes on Thursdays.

Changes from a lower transmission level to a higher transmission level may occur weekly. Changes from a higher transmission level to a lower transmission level may occur every 14 days at minimum, when thresholds are met.

Who makes that decision?

The data drive the decision, and counties that meet at least two criteria for high, moderate, or low will be moved to that level.

Where can I see data/transmission level criteria for my county?

You can see what transmission level your county is in and the current metrics here: coronavirus.utah.gov/utah-health-guidance-levels.

Do any of the transmission index criteria have more weight than others?

No. Each criteria carries equal weight when determining which level a county is in.

What is the difference between the ICU utilization measure and the COVID-19 ICU measure?

The COVID-19 Transmission Index looks at two different statewide ICU utilization measures together.

The ICU utilization measure looks at the percentage of patients who are hospitalized in an intensive care unit for any reason across, as well as COVID-19 patients who are in the ICU, across all hospitals in the state. The COVID-19 ICU measure looks at the percentage of patients who are hospitalized in an intensive care unit due to COVID-19.

How does a county lower its transmission index?

The actions of each individual and organization will have a profound effect on the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. Ultimately, our personal decisions determine what level of transmission we want to live with. The state has implemented specific thresholds that must be met. Counties will no longer be allowed to request a change from one level to another. All decisions about what transmission risk level a county is in will be decided based on the transmission index criteria.

Wearing a mask, physical distancing, washing your hands often, staying home when you are sick or test positive for COVID-19, and following public health guidelines will make a difference. Until a vaccine is widely available, these simple actions are how we will stay safe and keep our economy open.

When are masks required?

Masks are **required** for counties in the “high” level in public indoor settings and outdoors when physical distancing is not feasible. For businesses, this includes both employees and patrons.

Masks are also **required** in counties and cities where local officials have enacted mask requirements, in all K-12 schools, and in all state-owned buildings.

Masks are **required** at any establishment that allows public gathering, such as live events, movie theatres, sporting events, weddings, recreation, and entertainment. **This mask requirement is for all counties, no matter what level of transmission risk a county is in.**

Performers at these establishments (such as the actors in a theater production) are exempt from the mask requirement.

Masks are required by public health directive until 10/29 for counties in the “moderate” level. Masks are strongly recommended for counties in the "low" level. Any mask requirement in these counties will be made at the discretion of county executives in consultation with the local health officer.

These requirements or recommendations do not replace any local mask orders enacted by city or county government officials or businesses.

The State Public Health Order requiring masks in schools can be found here: coronavirus-download.utah.gov/Governor/State-Public-Health-Order-UPHO-2020-11-v.2.pdf.

The State Public Health Order requiring masks in state facilities can be found here: coronavirus-download.utah.gov/Health/UPHO-2020-12-Face-Coverings-in-State-Buildings.pdf.

Is the entire state under a mask mandate?

No. Face masks are required for counties in the “high” level in public indoor settings and outdoors when physical distancing is not feasible. For businesses, this includes both employees and patrons. People living in counties in the “moderate” transmission level are also directed by [Public Health Directive](#) to wear face masks in these same settings until October 29, 2020.

Masks are also **required** in counties and cities where local officials have enacted mask requirements, in all K-12 schools, and in all state-owned buildings.

Masks are **required** at any establishment that allows public gathering, such as live events, movie theatres, sporting events, weddings, recreation, and entertainment. **This mask requirement is for all counties, no matter what level of transmission risk a county is in.** Performers at these establishments (such as the actors in a theater production) are exempt from the mask requirement.

Masks are strongly recommended for counties in the "low" level. Any mask requirement in these counties will be made at the discretion of county executives in consultation with the local health officer.

These requirements or recommendations do not replace any local mask orders enacted by city or county government officials or businesses.

Are medical exemptions still in place for the face coverings?

Yes. [State Public Health Order 2020-19](#) lists what settings or individuals are allowed face mask exceptions.

Do child care facilities have to require masks now?

Child care facilities should follow state [child care licensing rules and regulations](#). Under the COVID-19 Transmission Index, child care facilities are also considered a business and should follow the “All businesses” guidelines.

Some child care facilities are also considered a public school and need to follow the [public health order](#) requiring masks in schools.

At what age are masks required?

According to [State Public Health Order 2020-19](#), children younger than 3 years of age are exempt from wearing a face mask.

What is the difference between the COVID-19 Transmission Index and the Phased Guidelines (color-coded restriction levels)?

The transmission index is a data-driven approach to help individuals, businesses, and local government leaders know what they can do to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in their communities.

We are no longer using color-coded restriction levels. The industry-specific guidelines have also been removed with the exception of restaurants, bars, and establishments that allow public gatherings (live events, movie theaters, sporting events, weddings, recreation, religious services, and entertainment). The transmission index is a simple and straightforward tool. The requirements of the transmission index focus on health behaviors which we know are most effective in stopping the spread of COVID-19 at this time.

These requirements do not replace any laws, ordinances, or administrative rules that apply to a specific industry. For example, child care facilities should follow the requirements for the level of transmission their county is in as well as state child care facility licensing rules.

What requirements do I need to follow for my industry?

We expect that businesses know how to keep [employees and patrons safe](#). We are no longer using color-coded restriction levels. The industry-specific guidelines have also been removed with the exception of restaurants, bars, and establishments that allow public gatherings (live events, movie theaters, sporting events, weddings, recreation, and entertainment).

Actions that are required in the COVID-19 transmission index can be found here: coronavirus.utah.gov/utah-health-guidance-levels.

Where do religious services fit into these requirements?

The new Transmission Index does not apply to individuals attending or participating in religious services.

Faith-based organizations are still encouraged to take steps to help limit the spread of COVID-19, such as:

- Allow for physical distancing (at least 6') as much as possible. And when it's not possible, encourage the use of face masks.
- Encourage participants to stay home when they are sick, have symptoms of COVID-19, have tested positive for COVID-19 or are awaiting test results, or have been asked to quarantine because they were exposed to COVID-19.
- And finally, encourage good hygiene through frequent hand washing.

Do religious organizations have to fill out the event management template?

No.

Can I go to church if I live in a county that is "high" or "moderate"?

Yes.

Do the limits on social gatherings apply to religious services?

No.

What about youth groups or scouts?

Only formal religious services are exempt from the requirements in the Transmission Index. If these activities are not formal religious services, the organizers should follow the requirements of the "Any establishment that allows public gathering" section of the index.

Can youth continue to play sports, through their school or recreation leagues with these requirements?

Yes. Youth sports organizations must follow the actions under the "Any establishment that allows public gathering" section of the transmission index. Schools should also refer to the guidelines established by the Utah High School Activities Association.

Spectators at these events must wear a face mask no matter what level the county is in. Players or participants are not required to wear masks. In addition, 6' of distancing is required between household groups in the "high" and "moderate" levels.

What does it mean by "hygiene practices"?

Good hygiene practices are some of the best ways to fight any illness, because this is how to stop germs from spreading. This includes COVID-19. You should follow normal hygiene practices when you are at work and at home.

- Stay home when you are sick.

- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often for 20 seconds with soap and water. If you do not have soap and water, use hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue. Do not use your hands.
- Do not shake hands or touch other people. Use other ways to greet people without touching.
- Try not to touch surfaces many people touch.

Wash your hands:

- After you cough or sneeze.
- After you use the restroom.
- Before you eat or make food.
- After you touch animals or pets.
- Before and after you care for another person who needs help, such as a child.
- Before and after your work shifts.
- Before and after you take breaks at work.

What does the new transmission index mean for schools?

Schools will continue to operate at all transmission index levels. Schools should refer to the [COVID-19 School Manual](#) and Utah State Board of Education's [School Reopening Planning Handbook](#) for guidance on how to best protect students, teachers, and employees.

The [State Public Health Order](#) requiring masks in K-12 schools is still in effect for all counties.

Why don't schools close in "high" transmission level areas?

Schools play an essential role in the infrastructure and well-being of our state and our communities. Schools may remain open to in person learning in all transmission levels.

Local school boards and school districts should work with their local health officer to determine when to move to a remote or hybrid learning model, depending on case counts and outbreak thresholds at the school or school district level.

Should I be working from home?

Employers should facilitate employees working from home when ill or if they are higher-risk individuals.

What does a "casual social gathering" mean?

According to [State Public Health Order 2020-19](#), a casual social gathering means a gathering of individuals from separate households at the same time and in the same place that does not involve formal oversight from a sponsoring person. "Casual social gathering" does not include a gathering for a primarily commercial, educational, political, religious, or similar purpose.

These gatherings may be held indoors or outdoors. Examples of casual social gatherings may include:

- Get-togethers with friends, families, or neighbors
- Celebrations of any kind that are not overseen by a formal organization (celebration of life events, baby showers, religious celebrations)
- Potlucks, BBQs, or dinner parties
- Book clubs
- Game nights
- Birthday parties
- Graduation parties
- Cultural celebrations (such as quinceañeras)

What is the difference between a casual social gathering and a public gathering or event?

Casual social gatherings primarily occur among friends and family in a home, park, picnic area, etc. Public gatherings or events have some sort of management structure actively overseeing the venue in which they occur.

What does “organizational oversight” mean?

Organizational oversight means somebody in a position of authority is monitoring the event or venue to ensure appropriate COVID-19 prevention measures are in place.

What does a “household group” mean?

Household group means people who live together.

Under public gatherings/events (live events, movies, sporting events, weddings, recreation, and entertainment) it doesn't give a maximum number of attendees. Is it determined by maintaining 6' distance?

Yes. There are no limits on the number of attendees at these public gatherings. Under the “high” and “moderate” levels, 6' physical distancing between household groups is required. Exceptions to this physical distancing requirements will be rare and must be reviewed by county executives in consultation with the local health officer.

Where do gyms, recreational facilities, and fitness centers fit into these requirements?

Gyms, recreational facilities, and fitness centers must follow the actions under the “All businesses” section of the transmission index.

If a gym or fitness center hosts an event or public gathering (for example, a youth sports league), the “Any establishment that allows public gathering, such as live events, movie theatres, sporting events, weddings, recreation and entertainment” guidance should also be followed.

Do I have to wear a face mask while I am at the gym?

Wearing face masks is not required while exercising, including at gyms.

Gyms should follow the “All businesses” section of the transmission index which requires 6’ of distancing between household groups. Gyms should still encourage patrons to wear masks when not actively exercising.

Can I have a group of more than 10 in a restaurant if the county is in the “high” level?

Yes, if the restaurant allows it and if the restaurant can ensure the appropriate physical distancing between parties.

Can restaurants and bars use plexiglass barriers in place of the physical distancing requirements?

No. Plexiglass barriers are not a substitute for physical distancing requirements between patrons. However, plexiglass barriers are encouraged, where feasible, at cash registers and customer service counters when 6’ distancing is difficult.

I work in a hair salon/barber shop/personal services industry, do I have to wear a mask? Do my customers have to wear masks?

When 6’ physical distancing cannot be maintained, everyone should wear a mask.

Are the healthcare specific guidelines still required?

Yes. Visit <https://coronavirus.utah.gov/recommendations-for-providers/> for the latest information on health care guidance.

Are elective surgeries being postponed statewide because of the new restrictions?

Not at this time. However, some local healthcare systems may decide to postpone surgeries when COVID-19 cases began to surge and their capacity to care for patients becomes strained.

“High” level counties

Are face masks required in a county that is at the “high” level?

Yes. Masks are required in public indoor settings, and outdoors, when physical distancing is not feasible. For businesses, this includes both employees and patrons.

Masks are **required** in counties and cities where local officials have enacted mask requirements, in all K-12 schools, and in all state-owned buildings.

Masks are **required** at any establishment that allows public gathering, such as live events, movie theatres, sporting events, weddings, recreation, and entertainment. **This mask requirement is for all counties, no matter what level of transmission risk a county is in.** Performers at these establishments (such as the actors in a theater production) are exempt from the mask requirement.

With social gatherings, if the group is outside, staying six feet apart and wearing masks, is it still limited to a gathering of 10 people?

Yes. Social gatherings of 10 or fewer are permitted. It does not matter if the gathering is indoors or outside.

“Moderate” level counties

Are face masks required in a county that is at the “moderate” level?

People living in counties in the “moderate” transmission level are directed by [Public Health Directive](#) to wear face masks until October 29, 2020.

Masks are also **required** in counties and cities where local officials have enacted mask requirements, in all K-12 schools, and in all state-owned buildings.

Masks are **required** at any establishment that allows public gathering, such as live events, movie theatres, sporting events, weddings, recreation, and entertainment. **This mask requirement is for all counties, no matter what level of transmission risk a county is in.** Performers at these establishments (such as the actors in a theater production) are exempt from the mask requirement.

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“Low” level counties

Are face masks required in a county that is at the “low” level?

Masks are strongly recommended for counties in the "low" level. Any mask requirement in these counties will be made at the discretion of county executives in consultation with the local health officer.

Masks are also **required** in counties and cities where local officials have enacted mask requirements, in all K-12 schools, and in all state-owned buildings.

Masks are **required** at any establishment that allows public gathering, such as live events, movie theatres, sporting events, weddings, recreation, and entertainment. **This mask requirement is for all counties, no matter what level of transmission risk a county is in.** Performers at these establishments (such as the actors in a theater production) are exempt from the mask requirement.

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