

To the Congregation:

At the Session meeting on February 28th, Session considered the options for wearing masks in worship in light of the latest CDC recommendations and the recommendations from the State of Oregon regarding wearing masks in public schools and public places.

Our first concern is always the Gospel mandate of protecting the most vulnerable. Session also recognizes the limitations wearing masks has placed on worship and community during this pandemic, but the protection of ourselves and the vulnerable correctly took priority during the pandemic.

Now, with the reported COVID cases trending downward in our county and with new CDC guidelines that consider both case counts and hospital capacity, Session is recommending changes to our mask guidelines during worship.

To arrive at our recommendation (see below) first, we reviewed the current data related to cases and hospital capacity for Deschutes County. As of this writing, Deschutes County has 21.4 new cases per day per 1000 residents. That puts us in the “HIGH” category for cases nationally, but our infection rate is in a low category.

Our hospital capacity data shows 68% of our hospital ICU beds are occupied which puts us in the low category with only 3 COVID patients in the ICU. Based on the data, the recommendation from the CDC continues to be to wear masks indoors. However, our data puts us right on the dividing line between high and moderate, which means if trends continue, we could be in the range for the CDC recommendation to change to be able to go without masks indoors, especially for people who are vaccinated and boosted.

Based on the trends and the State guidelines regarding public schools, Session recommends the following (subject to change if our COVID data points and trends change for the worse):

**Beginning Sunday, March 13, 2022, the wearing of masks will be optional for worship attendance. However, masks are encouraged for anyone who feels more comfortable wearing a mask, is not vaccinated, is immunocompromised, or is living with someone who is immunocompromised. In addition, if anyone is feeling ill on a particular Sunday and/or is having symptoms of COVID, you are urged to stay home.**

To try to make everyone comfortable with their decision in following this recommendation, the Worship Team will be making available on Sunday mornings N95 masks to anyone who wants one. Other masks brought from home are also acceptable to wear. In addition, worship services will continue to be broadcast live for those who are more comfortable in participating in worship this way.

Thank you for your understanding as we adjust to this change. Be assured your Session will continue to monitor our COVID data, and if changes are needed in the future, we will communicate those changes promptly.