

PRESS RELEASE



Anchorage Assembly Passes Public Health Emergency Ordinance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 12, 2021

After two weeks of public hearings, and written and in-person testimony from thousands of residents, the Anchorage Assembly has passed an Emergency Ordinance with the goal to slow the spread of COVID-19 and allow our health care system to return to a stable level. The public testimony played a significant role in shaping the revised Emergency Ordinance that was introduced.

Details of the Emergency Ordinance include:

- All individuals must wear masks or face coverings over their noses and mouths when they are indoors in areas which are open to the public or which are communal spaces shared with other individuals not from one's household.
 - Exemptions exist for cases such as children under the age of five, individuals who cannot tolerate a mask due to a physical or mental disability, and religious assemblies. The text of the Emergency Ordinance includes the full list.
- Businesses, employers, and building owners shall deny admittance to any individual who fails to comply with this Emergency Ordinance, as long as the regulation is applied in a manner consistent with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and any other applicable provision of law.
- Employers must make sure employees who are present in the workplace have access to and wear masks or face coverings when required.

The Emergency Ordinance goes into effect immediately and expires when Anchorage has either (1) reached a point of sufficient medical capacity, (2) there is no longer substantial or high community transmission of the virus per the CDC for 14 consecutive days, or (3) after 60 days without further action by the Assembly.

“Our hospitals and health care system are under great strain right now and this helps reduce that strain,” said the Ordinance’s Assembly sponsor Meg Zaletel. “The majority of people in our community want to do what’s best for the health of our city and now we have clear and reasonable guidelines, shaped by public feedback, that people can follow to keep our community safe.”

A full statement can be read below. A flyer for establishments to post at their entrances, as well as the full text of the Ordinance and an FAQ sheet are available at www.muni.org/Assembly.

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With the passage of this ordinance the Assembly will separately take up action on whether to continue the public hearing AO 2021-91 and 2021-91(S) further into the future or continue as scheduled.

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STATEMENT ON OCTOBER 12 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY ORDER

Over the past two weeks, the Anchorage Assembly has heard from 276 people through in-person and phone testimony at six public meetings, and from over 4,000 people in written testimony. Through the process, there has been very thoughtful and productive testimony on how a mask mandate will affect members of our community, with many great suggestions for how to make the mandate more effective and less intrusive. That testimony has shaped the Emergency Ordinance that we introduced today.

The Anchorage Assembly has made a concerted effort to protect the public process to ensure that as many people as possible had an opportunity to voice their opinion on the subject before we made our decision. However, the public process has been abused by members of our community who have conspired to prevent the Assembly from translating those perspectives into much needed action.

After carefully listening to and reading the testimony submitted, we have concluded that we have enough data to make an informed decision that represents the will of the majority of the community. Furthermore, weeks of rapid increase in community transmission of COVID-19 and hospitalizations that are threatening our public health and safety demonstrate that we do not have any more time to lose before taking action.

Therefore, on October 12th, Assembly Members Zaletel and Petersen introduced an Emergency Ordinance titled *An Emergency Ordinance of the Anchorage Municipal Assembly Regarding Public Health and Safety Measures for the Covid-19 Pandemic*. With its passage, the Emergency Ordinance will go into effect immediately and will expire when Anchorage has reached a point of sufficient medical capacity, has 14 days of being out of substantial or high transmission rate status, or no later than 60 days without further action by the Assembly.

The Ordinance requires that all individuals must wear masks or face coverings over their noses and mouths when they are indoors in areas which are open to the public or which are communal spaces shared with other individuals not from one's household and states that businesses, employers, and building owners shall deny admittance to any individual who fails to comply with the Emergency Ordinance. In a response to public feedback, the Ordinance provides several exemptions for people for whom wearing a mask presents a significant hardship, such as children under the age of five, individuals who cannot tolerate a mask due to a physical or

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mental disability, people engaged in sporting activities, and religious assemblies. The text of the Emergency Ordinance includes the full list. This ordinance shall also be applied in a manner consistent with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and any other applicable provision of law.

The Anchorage Assembly truly appreciates the engagement from so many members of our community on this issue. It is important that we engage in vigorous and healthy debates on issues before passing measures that will deeply impact our community. It is also important that the Assembly protects our community's right to due process and to be heard and moves forward with the critical business of making hard and important decisions for our city.

The Assembly thanks everyone who engaged on this issue for your commitment to the health and wellbeing of our city and looks forward to continued dialogue and cooperation as we work to make our city a healthier, safer place for all who live and visit here.