

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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?

Casual social gatherings means a group of individuals meeting for a common social or recreational 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)

Casual social gatherings do not include formal religious services or events with organizational oversight. These types of things should follow the requirements under the “Any establishment that allows public gathering” section of the Transmission Index, in addition to “Actions for all individuals and businesses” section.

