

## MASKS: Mandate applies in all indoor public spaces

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rate of cases and mortality in comparison with many other regions, the state is not meeting benchmarks for declining hospitalizations and the level of unidentified community spread. Hospitalizations for confirmed COVID-19 cases have been climbing, but there is no immediate shortage of available hospital beds and ventilators.

Sisters (97759 zip code) now has confirmed COVID-19 cases, after months of reporting zero. The exact number is not reported until it exceeds 10 cases; the most recent 97759 report from OHA merely indicates fewer than 10 cases.

In making her announcement, Brown said, "From the beginning of the reopening process, I have said that reopening comes with the risk of seeing an increase in COVID-19 cases beyond our health systems' capacity to test, trace, and isolate them. Over the last month, we have seen the disease spread at an alarming rate in both urban and rural counties... Modeling from the Oregon Health Authority shows that if we don't take further action to reduce the spread of the disease, our hospitals could be overwhelmed by new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations within weeks."

The mask mandate had an immediate impact in Sisters, as businesses are required to enforce it with their customers.

Jeff McDonald, manager at Ray's Food Place, reported a rough day at the store on July 1, when the mandate took effect. In a Facebook post, he wrote:

"Well, day one was interesting. We encountered 400+ people without masks. We had 250+ go back to their car and get them. We gave out 175 masks to those without any. We had a dozen at least refuse a mask and leave. I was called an idiot, a fascist pig, a Nazi, a (expletive) twit and a few others. Most people were understanding and appreciative. It amazes me that so many were completely clueless that it is now mandated. We had a couple folks verbally attack others. Please remember — some have medical exemption and do not have to wear a mask. Kids under 13 are exempt. You don't always know everything you think you know. Let's all spread the word without being abusive to each other."

On Thursday, he told *The Nugget* that things had smoothed out considerably.

"Today I would say we had 10 percent of the people that we had yesterday that had no clue," he said. "Most

people are understanding, at least when we tell them."

McDonald said that his crew is "handling it really well, actually. None of us want to be the enforcer, but we are. That's the way the mandate reads."

Steve Macey, owner and operator of Hardtails Bar & Grill issued a plea that customers and fellow business owners respect the position businesses are in and comply with the mandate.

"If the governor decides COVID is not under control, she could push us back into Phase 1 or she could shut the whole state down," he told *The Nugget*. "I just think that everyone needs to be on the same page. Whether you think it's a real virus or whether you think masks work doesn't matter to me. I'm trying to keep my business open, my lottery machines operating, and keep my liquor license."

He doesn't like having to be an enforcer, especially when customers get angry and leave and don't even wait to hear about outdoor service alternatives.

"I think it's pretty crappy that Governor Brown put it on businesses to enforce this," he said.

There have been enough inquiries about law enforcement's role that Central Oregon agencies issued a joint statement:

"It has always been our goal to help community members understand the health and safety guidelines that have been put into place across Oregon. Our philosophy of enforcing this and other orders will continue to be education and to seek voluntary compliance. As

the Governor has stated, the expectation is that OSHA Oregon will take the lead in enforcing her face mask requirements.

Oregon Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA) is taking the lead in enforcing face covering requirements for Oregon businesses.

"Law enforcement will respond to and investigate all calls for service from business owners who report disputes or disturbances related to the face mask requirement, and then take the appropriate enforcement action if necessary. Unless the call requires a law enforcement response, call OSHA at the toll-free number, 800-922-2689."

A local worker in a retail establishment in Sisters sent a statement to *The Nugget* asking for the public's understanding of the challenges retail workers face. The worker requested anonymity due to concerns about employment security.

"I work in a store in Sisters. I have worked in this store during the whole COVID pandemic," the worker wrote. "During the majority of the epidemic, we did not have to wear masks, then we were told to do so. We made sure to keep essential products for essential needs and worked hard to keep the people of Sisters stocked best as we could based on what we receive.

"We have distributor problems, and things going on in the background that the general public would not know. Healthcare workers get a lot of credit for working during all this but I don't hear the store workers getting as much credit, yet we are in there every day working and doing

our best to wait on them and their needs.

"During this pandemic, it hasn't brought out the best in people either. People are rude, upset, and angry. I am sure they are all tired of this just as I am tired of this. The last thing that workers need on top of all the stresses we deal with are people who are nit-picky and want to make complaints because they don't like the way someone wears a mask in a store. Someone made a complaint that a mask needed to be tighter and their details of what they think to our upper management. I just have to say this to that person or anyone else that decides to make a complaint in the future: You take a job in a store breaking down freight, stocking shelves, cashiering, constantly cleaning to make

things safe, and doing all this eight to nine hours (barely able to breathe being nauseated most of the time), and excuse me if someone wants to pull their mask down for a second to get oxygen.

"We are doing the best we can in our stores and we don't need complaints on top of everything else. I look at it this way, if you are going to be that critical, then just stay home. Have someone else buy your supplies. Order your supplies, but don't make it harder for workers. In spite of what you think, we are truly doing the best we can during this to help you and your loved ones. I don't need a pat on my back. I just want the people of the retail and food industry to be given the respect they deserve while you are shopping."

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