

CDC: Vaccinated people can safely be outside without masks

BY MIKE STOBBE

The Associated Press

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased its guidelines Tuesday on the wearing of masks outdoors, saying fully vaccinated Americans don't need to cover their faces anymore unless they are in a big crowd of strangers.

And those who are unvaccinated can go outside without masks in some situations, too.

The new guidance represents

another carefully calibrated step on the road back to normal from the coronavirus outbreak that has killed over 570,000 people in U.S. For most of the past year, the CDC had been advising Americans to wear masks outdoors if they are within 6 feet of one another.

"Today, I hope, is a day when we can take another step back to the normalcy of before," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said. "Over the past year, we

have spent a lot of time telling Americans what you can't do. Today, I am going to tell you some of the things you can do, if you are fully vaccinated."

The change comes as more than half of U.S. adults have received at least one dose of vaccine, and more than a third have been fully vaccinated.

Walensky said the decision was driven by rising vaccination numbers; declines in COVID-19 cases, hospitaliza-

tions and deaths; and research showing that less than 10% of documented instances of transmission of the virus happened outdoors.

Some experts portrayed the relaxed guidance as a reward and a motivator for people to get vaccinated — a message President Joe Biden sounded, too.

"The bottom line is clear: If you're vaccinated, you can do more things, more safely, both outdoors as well as indoors,"

Biden said. "So for those who haven't gotten their vaccinations yet, especially if you're younger or thinking you don't need it, this is another great reason to go get vaccinated now."

But unvaccinated people — defined as those who have yet to receive both doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson formula — should wear masks at small outdoor gatherings that include other unvaccinated peo-

ple, the CDC says. They also should keep their faces covered when dining at outdoor restaurants with friends from multiple households.

Everyone, fully vaccinated or not, should keep wearing masks at crowded outdoor events such as concerts or sporting events, the CDC says. The agency continues to recommend masks at indoor public places, saying that is still the safer course even for vaccinated people.

Parking

Continued from A1

But the idea has received pushback from several residents, who fear the policy change could lead to more crowded parking around the city, including more cars spilling into neighborhoods.

A group called Does Parking Matter? — which is comprised of a loose association of people who belong to neighborhood associations — sent out an online, not-statistically-valid survey earlier this year asking residents whether they supported the idea of removing parking requirements for new housing: About 83% said no.

"We all want to build a better Bend," said Mike Walker, a representative for the group. "We just need to understand there's more than one side to that story."

The case for getting rid of parking requirements

The basic concept goes like this: Parking is expensive, and that drives up the cost of a project. A new parking space in a structure can cost \$30,000, according to Michael Anderson, a researcher with Sightline Institute. The idea is that the less land mandated for parking, the more of it can be used to build housing. That means a developer can put more units on the ground, which makes a project more financially feasible than it was with the parking require-



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ments, which can translate in the end to lower rents and home prices.

With cities getting more and more expensive to live in, the goal of policies like these is to offer choices, Anderson said.

"One of the ways to do that is to offer more and less-expensive housing in places where you don't have to drive as much," Anderson said.

Kebler doesn't see removing parking requirements as a silver-bullet solution to bringing down housing prices and making Bend a less car-dependent city, but rather as one strategy of many to get there.

"We have to start somewhere," Kebler said.

The concerns

Some residents and developers fear the costs of remov-

ing parking requirements outweigh the benefits.

Walker, a member of the River West Neighborhood Association, questions whether removing parking requirements will deliver the benefits advocates claim.

Walker said he is unconvinced that removing requirements for parking would affect rents, based on conversations he has had with property managers.

The parking group is interested in a conversation about parking reform, Walker said, but fears that no requirements at all will lead to developers who won't build enough parking for their projects. That could mean more cars on the street, causing congestion in nearby neighborhoods.

"I trust the big builders,"

Walker said, referring to development companies like Pahlisch Homes that build large housing subdivisions. "But there's a lot of smaller developers who will overbuild the lot, trying to maximize the size, and their tenants will start falling out into the neighborhood."

The concern of cars spilling out into neighborhoods is also shared by some affordable housing developers, who said they would build parking on-site regardless of whether the city mandates it or not.

"I don't think we would just move forward and say we would do one without parking," said Rob Roy, a co-operating manager of Pacific Crest Affordable Housing in Bend. "Cars are still a part of how we live still."

Roy said the current parking requirements for affordable housing on the books work well.

And while parking comes with a cost, a more concerning barrier that makes it harder for affordable housing projects to pencil out is the price of lumber, Roy said. The cost of lumber is coming up three to four times higher than the company currently budgets for, he said.

Keith Wooden, the real estate director for Housing Works, said Bend doesn't have a robust enough public transit system to reasonably consider building housing without parking on-site. Wooden

said he would support making easy and low-cost variances for parking for certain kinds of housing projects for populations like seniors or adults with developmental disabilities, who may not have as many cars as the general population anyway.

The possibility of people from his housing developments parking in surrounding neighborhoods is also not a risk worth taking. Affordable housing projects already carry a stigma and can face pushback from neighbors, Wooden said.

"Yeah, you get more units in the short term, but then you have a forever problem of people spilling into the streets ... and the reality of asking: 'How long is it going to be until people don't need that car?'" Wooden said.

The fact neither developer would likely at this time take the opportunity to reduce the amount of parking bolsters one of the policy advocates' central points.

Removing parking requirements does not mean existing parking will be taken away, and it doesn't mean new parking in Bend won't be built, said David Welton. Welton is a founding member of the BendYIMBY group, which advocates for an adequate and diverse housing supply for all residents and supports the removal of parking requirements.

Because most Bend residents are still dependent on cars, developers will still meet

the market demand of people wanting a place to put their car, Welton said.

It's lower-end housing, like microunits or smaller apartments, where not having parking requirements can make a difference as to whether a project could get off the ground in the first place.

Welton also believes concerns about cars "spilling out" onto streets are overblown, especially when compared to Central Oregon's housing crisis.

"A place to live is a pretty big benefit," Welton said. "A car parked along a street, in my book, is not a big harm."

As for concerns about Bend not having public transit in place to support less parking, Councilor Kebler said part of what incentivizes public transit be more robust is having dense neighborhoods. Getting rid of parking requirements helps create denser neighborhoods that can be more easily served by transit.

"I think a lot of opposition comes from seeing the status quo as the natural state of things. We have built Bend to induce folks to get into their cars to get around," Kebler said. "We have prioritized space in our land use for cars and use of cars. That's why we are where we are today. To move away from that, we're going to have to make different prioritizations and decisions."

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