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In the Loop

CDC Loosens Mask-wearing Guidance for Most of U.S. Population

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced updates to its mask-wearing recommendations, loosening guidance for a majority of the U.S. population.

The CDC provides [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) as a tool to help communities decide what prevention steps to take based on the latest data. These levels can be low, medium or high and are determined by hospital beds being used, hospital admissions and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area. These levels inform the agency's guidance on mask-wearing and COVID-19 vaccines and testing.

The agency now recommends that only individuals in high-risk areas wear a mask in indoor settings. Currently, around 90% of the U.S. population is in a low- or medium-risk county. The CDC no longer recom-

mends indoor masks as a prevention step in these areas.

Notably, the CDC's new mask-wearing guidelines apply to its guidance for K-12 schools, meaning that it no longer recommends masks as a COVID-19 prevention step for schools in low- or medium-risk counties. Previously, the agency had recommended universal indoor masking in educational settings.

Individuals are always welcome to wear a mask at any time if they feel safer with it, according to the CDC. Additionally, people with symptoms, a positive test or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should continue to wear a mask.

“With widespread population immunity, the overall risk of severe disease is now generally lower.”

— CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky

Next Steps

The CDC provides a tool to find out more about local COVID-19 Community Levels and the recommended prevention steps by county. The agency notes that as the coronavirus pandemic evolves, this guidance could be subject to change.



Supply Chains and Inflation: What This Means for You

The pandemic continues to affect supply chains and inflation rates. Amid this disruption, you may be noticing higher prices when it comes to purchasing everyday items, dining at restaurants and filling up at the gas pump. Undoubtedly, drastic consumer pricing changes may be fueling financial anxieties, and it remains to be seen if there will be any relief in 2022. This article explores today's supply chain issues, consumer pricing and your budget.

Supply Chain Issues

Supply chain problems were apparent at the beginning of the pandemic as many store shelves were empty of essential items like toilet paper. Nearly two years later, you may still be struggling to find specific items, and if you find them, you may need to pay more than usual.

The pandemic has disrupted most aspects of the global supply chain, making it challenging for companies to manufacture,

transport and distribute their goods. For example, e-commerce mixed with consumer demands has surpassed the market's capacity to produce or ship orders. Retailers and other businesses are also having difficulty finding enough employees. It's unknown when shortages and delays will end, but they're likely to continue to some extent this year — and maybe longer.

Inflation and Consumer Pricing

Inflation is a normal occurrence in which prices of goods and services increase, and your purchasing power decreases. In other words, your dollar won't buy as much today as it did five or 10 years ago. Consequently, many choose to invest a proportion of their money instead of keeping it as cash. The Consumer Price Index rose to 7% in December 2021, the highest since the early 1980s. Some industry experts believe soaring costs are temporary due to messy supply chains. On the other hand, some experts believe inflation is here to stay amid a tight labor market and supply constraints. As experts — and even officials within the Federal Reserve — are on both sides of the debate, only time will tell if hiked inflation is here to stay.

What You Can Do

To deal with this uncertainty, it's best to have a financial game plan and focus on what you can control. The cost of necessary goods will likely continue to rise, so this could mean fitting larger grocery bills and transportation costs into a budget. Regardless of your situation, it can be helpful to discuss your financial and investment goals with a financial advisor. If you have additional questions or need resources for financial assistance, speak to your employer.