



# County of San Diego

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## **EMS MEDICAL DIRECTOR URGES PROTECTIVE ACTIONS DURING THE NEW COVID-19 PANDEMIC SURGE**

The COVID-19 pandemic remains a grave threat to San Diego's first responder and healthcare resources. As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a surge in local infections, increased ED volumes, and strain on the county's EMS services and providers. Vaccination remains a critical intervention to control the pandemic, and we cannot overstate the immediate importance for all EMS providers, healthcare workers, and their household members to take this simple precaution. Getting vaccinated markedly reduces your risk of transmitting the virus to young children, immunocompromised people, and our prehospital patients. The vaccines are safe and effective. Please review the COVID-19 Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions at [coronavirus-sd.com](http://coronavirus-sd.com) for additional information. We strongly encourage every eligible EMS provider to be fully vaccinated.

The arrival of the Delta variant, known to be much more transmissible than prior variants, has changed the pandemic's trajectory. While available vaccines have proven to significantly reduce the likelihood of severe symptoms, hospitalization, and death, additional mitigation measures are currently needed to control this rapidly spreading pandemic. Vaccinated individuals can contract COVID-19 – known as *breakthrough cases* – and current evidence suggests that vaccinated individuals can spread the infection to others. Because of this concern, it is essential to continue adhering to basic public health measures to curb viral spread. Non-pharmaceutical interventions include universal masking and physical distancing. Masking remains particularly important to protect the vulnerable populations we serve, our first responders, healthcare workers, and their families.

To protect yourself, your coworkers, and your household members, if you have access to surgical masks or N-95 respirators/equivalent, wear them instead of cloth facial coverings. This is especially important while in enclosed spaces, like fire stations and dispatch centers. Our prior recommendation to [place a surgical facemask on all EMS patients, as tolerated](#), remains in effect. As San Diego County currently has moderate to substantial community transmission, [CDC continues to recommend](#) universal masking while on duty, surgical masking while caring for patients, and donning N-95 respirators (or equivalent) while treating known or suspected COVID-19 patients and while performing *any* aerosol-generating procedure.

We continue to encourage EMS providers to exercise extra diligence to protect their health and safety, both on- and off-duty. Practice the “**3Ws**”: **(1) Wash your hands, (2) Wear your mask, and (3) Walk away (maintain at least 6 feet from others)**. Your actions can help mitigate this real and escalating threat. Your patients, families, and the entire community are depending on you.

**The pandemic is not over. Please act now to protect yourself, your loved ones, coworkers, and patients.**

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kristi Koenig". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristi L. Koenig, MD, FACEP, FIFEM, FAEMS, Medical Director  
San Diego County Emergency Medical Services Office  
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cc: Eric McDonald, MD, MPH, Chief Medical Officer  
Wilma Wooten, MD, MPH, Public Health Officer  
Herman Reddick, Director  
Andrew Parr, EMS Administrator