When will masks be optional at OUMC? We hear the question asked, and your church council wants to be as transparent as possible in communicating our decision making process. Throughout the pandemic, we have followed the guidance recommended by the CDC and public health officials. That's been the process for deciding when to reopen to in-person services in July 2020, for moving to online services around Christmas 2020, for going mask-optional earlier this year, and for returning to mask required indoors this summer. So, the answer to the question of when we'll be mask optional again is "when it's recommended that we do so."

Pretty nebulous and frustrating answer, huh?

What does that mean for us at OUMC? Let's take a look at the specifics:

As of today, the CDC recommends that masks be required indoors when community transmission is in the High category or the Substantial category. CDC guidance moves to masks optional indoors once community transmission falls into the Moderate category. To be in the Moderate category, a county must have a positivity rate below 8% over the past 7 days AND fewer than 50 new cases per 100,000 people over the past 7 days.

The latest census data for Christian County estimates the population of the county at just under 89,000 people. For us to move into the Moderate category -- where masking indoors becomes optional -- we need to have a weekly positivity rate below 8% AND have fewer than 45 new COIVD cases a week in the county.

The good news is that both of these numbers have been trending downward for Christian County. In fact, we've been below the 8% positive rate for a while now. As of last weekend, Christian County is reporting a 7.01% positive rate. What's not trending downward quite as quickly are the number of new cases per week. As of last weekend, Christian County has reported 109 new cases in the past week.

Your church council is continuing to monitor the situation as the data comes in. You're more than welcome to watch along with us at [https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view|community\_transmission\_level](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view%7Ccommunity_transmission_level). Once we enter the Moderate category, we will begin discussion in earnest about when to move to masks optional inside the building, and we'll certainly keep everyone informed as the situation changes.

As always, if you have a question or comment about this or any other church policy, feel free to reach out to your church council and ask us.