Summary From the New CDC Framework:

The new CDC framework uses hospitalizations and hospital capacity, to help to determine whether the level of COVID 19 and severe disease are low, medium, or high in a community (in addition to cases and test positivity). “A community’s COVID 19 level is determined by a combination of three pieces of information:

* new hospitalizations for COVID 19,
* current hospital beds occupied by COVID 19 patients or hospital capacity,
* new COVID 19 cases.

This updated approach focuses on directing prevention efforts towards protecting people at high risk for severe illness and preventing hospitals and healthcare systems from being overwhelmed.”

To find the community level, the CDC updated their website to reflect their new framework. People will be able to go to www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO to find their community level and what prevention strategies are recommended, including where or when to mask. They include the caveat that people who remain at higher risk for COVID including those who are immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions, those who have disabilities, or those who live with people who are at risk, might choose to take extra precautions regardless of what level their community is in.”

CDC recommendations at low, medium and high level. (Regardless of level, the CDC continues to recommend that people stay up to date on vaccines and get tested if they’re sick):

Low level: (There is limited impact on the healthcare system and low amounts of severe disease in the community.) People should stay up to date with their vaccines and get tested if they’re sick.

Medium level: (More people are experiencing severe disease in the community and they’re starting to see more impact on the health healthcare system). The CDC recommends that people who are high risk, such as someone who is immunocompromised, should talk to their healthcare provider about taking additional precautions and may choose to wear a mask.

High level: (There is high amount of people experiencing severe disease and high potential for healthcare systems strains.) **The CDC recommends that everyone wear a mask indoors, in public, including in schools.**

Dr. Greta Massetti, PhD, MPH, (Branch Chief, Field Epidemiology and Prevention Branch) stated the following:

* Some people may choose to wear a mask at any time based on personal preference.
* People who wear high quality masks are well protected, even if others around them are not masking.
* There are some situations where people should always wear a mask:
  + if symptomatic for COVID 19
  + if they tested positive for COVID 19
  + if they have been exposed to someone with COVID 19.
* As of this February 25th announcement, they updated their recommendations for schools.
  + Since July, 2021, CDC recommended universal masking in schools, no matter what level of impact COVID 19 was having on the community.
  + **With this update, CDC will now only** **recommend universal school masking in communities at the high level**.
  + Importantly, COVID 19 community levels and public health prevention strategies can be dialed up when our communities are experiencing more severe disease and dialed down when things are more stable.
* What these updated metrics mean for where we are as a country:
  + As of February 25th, more than half of counties representing about 70% of Americans are in areas with low or medium COVID 19 community levels.
  + This is an increase from about one third of counties at low or medium community levels last week and we continue to see indicators improve in many communities.

Final thoughts on the new CDC framework from Dr. Rochelle Walensky MD, MPH **(**Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the administrator of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry):

* None of us know what the future may hold for us and for this virus and we need to be prepared and we need to be ready for whatever comes next.
* We want to give people a break from things like mask wearing when our levels are low and then have the ability to reach for them again, should things get worse in the future.
* We at CDC will continue to follow the science and epidemiology to make public health recommendations and guidance based on the data.
* Our new framework was rigorously evaluated both with current data and retrospectively during the Alpha, Delta and Omicron waves and these new metrics have demonstrated predictive capacity for weeks into the future.
* We will continue to evaluate how well they perform in our communities.
* This new framework will best way for us to judge what level of preventive measures may be needed in our communities.
* If or when new variants emerge or the virus surges, we have more ways to control the virus and protect ourselves and our communities than ever before.