



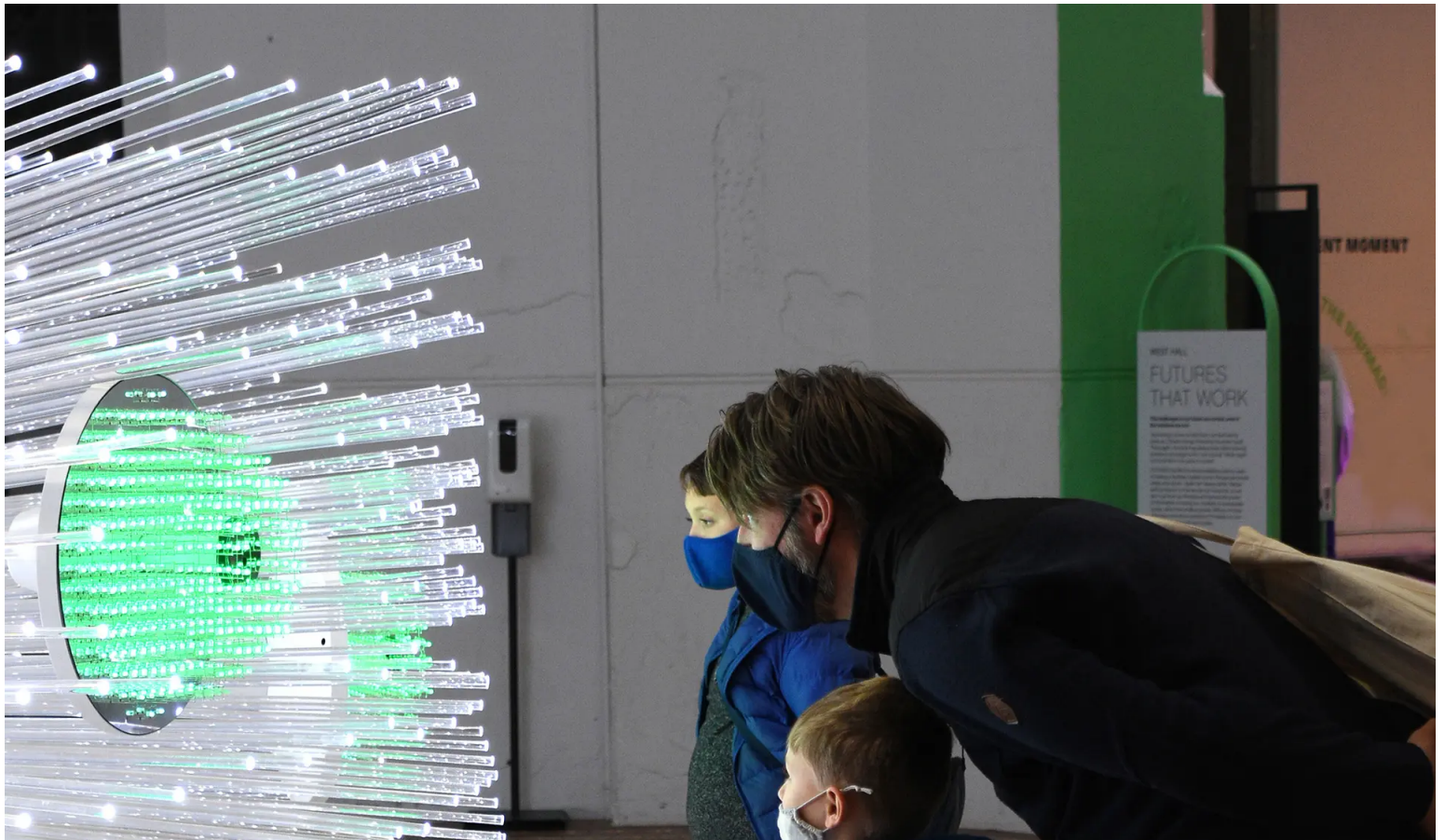
**Covid-19** // News

# As Omicron wave recedes, US museums drop vaccine and mask requirements

With Covid-19 cases down sharply from January's peak, art institutions from the Smithsonian to the Seattle Art Museum are no longer requiring visitors to mask up

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Visitors at the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building in December 2021

Photo by Amaury Laporte, via Flickr

With the spike of Covid-19 cases and deaths caused by the Omicron surge easing in the US, many museums are rolling back extra security measures put in place in December and January, and in many instances going further by doing away with capacity limits, health screenings, temperature checks, vaccine requirements and mask mandates entirely. The updated Covid-19 safety rules reflect a general loosening of restrictions by authorities at the state, county and municipal levels across the country.

In Washington, DC, whose mask mandate for many indoor spaces expired at the end of February, both the [Smithsonian Institution](#) [↗](#) (which operates 19 museums there and in New York City, plus the National Zoo) and the National Gallery of Art will no longer require visitors to wear masks indoors beginning tomorrow (11 March). The Phillips Collection, meanwhile, has maintained its policy of requiring visitors five and older to show proof of vaccination and visitors two and older to wear masks. A spokesperson says the Phillips has no plans to change those policies, “Our safety guidelines remain the same.”

At the Baltimore Museum Art (BMA), visitors aged two and older are required to wear masks, but that is about to change. “Starting next week,” a spokesperson says, “the BMA’s policy will be ‘masks encouraged’.”

In New York, the municipal mandate requiring that most businesses demand patrons show proof of vaccination was lifted on 7 March, and institutions including the Metropolitan Museum and Brooklyn Museum have stopped checking vaccines (both still require visitors two and older to wear masks). But some of the city’s museums—including the Whitney Museum, New Museum, Museum of Modern Art and its affiliate in Queens, MoMA PS1—are still requiring all visitors five years and older show proof of vaccination.

In Massachusetts, museums have adopted similarly varied rules. The Museum of Fine Arts and Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston have both dropped their mask mandates (except, at the ICA, for seated events, where masks and proof of vaccination or a negative Covid-19 test from the last 48h are required). At the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass Moca) in North Adams, visitors five years old and over are required to show proof of vaccination and visitors two and over are required to wear masks. And at the Worcester Museum of Art, wearing a mask is no longer required but showing proof of vaccination (for visitors five and older) still is.

In California, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art continues to require visitors to show proof of vaccination (for visitors 12 and over at Lacma) and to wear masks, though the county's mask mandate [was lifted](#) for most public venues on 4 March. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles has differing requirements based on vaccination status: visitors with proof of vaccination are not required to wear masks; those who are not vaccinated must show a negative test result from the past 72 hours and "are also asked" to wear masks, per [museum guidelines](#). The Getty Center has [similar requirements](#).

In San Francisco, SFMOMA requires all visitors two and older to wear masks, but only requires proof of vaccination from visitors dining at its Cafe 5 restaurant. The Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), meanwhile, is continuing to operate at limited capacity and requiring all visitors two and older to wear masks, but is only requiring proof of vaccination for visitors five and older attending events in the museum's auditorium.

"While it's true that our local public health regulations no longer require indoor masking, BAMPFA has voluntarily chosen to retain our mask mandate for all visitors and staff," says a museum spokesperson. "We're very encouraged by the continuing downward trajectory of Covid cases in our region, and we do anticipate lifting our mask requirement in the future if this trend continues."

On 1 March, the Seattle Art Museum [stopped](#) requiring visitors to show proof of vaccination, and as of 12 March visitors will no longer be required to wear masks. Likewise, the Portland Art Museum in Oregon currently requires all visitors to wear masks but, as of 12 March masks will be optional for visitors and staff.

Away from the east and west coasts, institutions including the Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and Crystal Bridges Museum in Arkansas have dropped their mask mandates (save in some cases for special events). Some never had mask or vaccine

requirements in place, notably institutions in states where [Republican lawmakers banned](#) such mandates in schools and elsewhere.

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