

YOU'RE LISTENING TO KMRE NEWS. I'M MAURA CURRIE – GOOD TO BE WITH YOU THIS AFTERNOON.

COVID CHANGES AFOOT

Two years into the pandemic, some COVID-related policy changes are afoot at the state level. Governor Jay Inslee's office announced today that the state will lift the indoor mask mandate early – in cooperation with Oregon and California. All three Pacific states are expected to move to mask recommendations in schools, rather than requirements, and to lift the indoor mandate for other indoor spaces, in less than two weeks; the changes will be effective after 11:59 pm on March 11th, the Friday after next. Inslee's office cites declining case rates and hospitalizations across the West Coast as the impetus for the change. Two weeks ago, he'd announced the end of the mandate would be March 21st.

And an advisory group to the state board of health has voted against requiring COVID vaccination for Washington's schoolchildren. The group voted 7 to 6 against the proposal, with 4 members abstaining. The proposal for a vaccine requirement now goes to the board of health itself, which could potentially override the advisory group.

WNS

LEDE: Washington state could head to the front of the pack when it comes to electrifying new buildings. Eric Tegethoff (TEG-it-off) has more.

Tag: Washington state cities, including Seattle, Shoreline and Tacoma, already have ensured that new buildings must be electrified.

BORDER RESTRICTIONS Starting today, those who are fully vaccinated will now have the option of providing a COVID-19 rapid antigen test result when traveling to Canada. Previously only a PCR test was accepted. Rapid tests will need to be taken the day prior to arrival at the land border. At-home tests will not be accepted - they must be administered by a lab or healthcare entity. Submitting information to the mobile app or website ArriveCAN is still required. Local facilities offering the rapid test note a cost of 60 dollars, a lower cost in comparison to the PCR test, which could range from 160 to 189 dollars. The government of Canada lightened this border measure due to data that indicates the Omicron variant has passed its peak. Local labs currently promote that they offer rapid antigen tests are ARCpoint Labs, Nooksack Valley Drug, and Sumas Drug. A full list of COVID-19 testing locations can be found on Whatcom County's website.

PEACE ARCH

As Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues, many American leaders and civilians have shown their support for Ukraine and its sovereignty as a country.

About 50 gathered at the Peace Arch yesterday with signs and calls for peace. The Cascadia Daily News reported that the protesters gathered to honor the Ukrainian military for its resistance. Some also called for the U.S. to supply more ammunition and equipment to Ukraine. The sanctions the U.S. has imposed on Russia will help, but not immediately, they said.

Meanwhile Gov. Jay Inslee used Twitter over the weekend to express his support for Ukraine and to call for more sanctions on Russia.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine began Thursday.

PLANNING DIRECTOR

Bellingham's new planning director starts work tomorrow. Blake Lyon takes over the planning and community development department. He comes from Pinellas County, Florida where he spent seven years as director of building and development review. Before that he worked as planning and housing director in Redwood City, California.

In a news release announcing the hire, Lyons called Bellingham a dynamic city where the city staff, elected officials, businesses and residents are already working together to protect the quality of the city. WX: An areal flood watch is in effect through 4pm on Wednesday. Excessive rain could cause river and creek flooding – authorities say those living in flood prone areas should be prepared, just in case. Today: intermittent rain will continue, with some heavier downpours throughout tapering to showers overnight. We'll see a low of 45 degrees tonight. Tomorrow: cloudiness with some rain. The national weather service warns that road spray due to standing water and rain could make road visibility and driving difficult. We'll see a high of 54 and a low of 45. And Wednesday: cloudy conditions with some showers. We'll see a high of 51 and a low of 41.

TUNE IN TO KMRE NEWS WEEKDAYS AT 3, 4 AND 5 PM. FOR COMMUNITY POWERED KMRE, I'M MAURA CURRIE.