

The Lenox contra dance series has a new COVID-19 policy, effective January 2023. While the old policy had three possibilities: unrestricted, masks required, and canceled, the new policy has only two possibilities: unrestricted and canceled. As with the old policy, the CDC's [COVID data tracker](#) is used to decide whether a dance will be unrestricted or canceled. Specifically, if the CDC tracker indicates that:

- ▶ **Neither Berkshire nor Columbia counties are at a high (red) community level at the time of the dance, the dance will be unrestricted.**
- ▶ **Either Berkshire or Columbia counties is at a high (red) community level, the dance will be canceled.**

There are several reasons for this change.

First, this policy better aligns with the CDC guidelines on mask wearing in indoor public places. Although people may choose to wear a mask at any time and wearing one does offer some protection against COVID-19, the CDC recommends mask wearing for everyone in indoor public spaces only when community levels are high.

Second, the dominant Omicron strains of the COVID-19 virus, though more contagious, are less potent than prior strains. Vaccines and treatments that protect against severe illness are now readily available for COVID-19.

Third, the one dance we had where masks were required in October of 2022 was very poorly attended despite having a quality band and caller, suggesting the unpopularity of this option in our dance community.

Finally, heading into the fourth year of this pandemic, people are now very well informed about the risks of COVID-19. Therefore, the weight of responsibility for managing those risks has shifted more to individuals than institutions. Simply put, it is not the responsibility of the Lenox contra dance to “protect” people from their own choices beyond adhering to the rules, regulations, and guidelines set by all relevant jurisdictions and health agencies, which our new policy does.

Although this new policy means that all dances will be unrestricted, we welcome and encourage dancers to wear masks if they feel more comfortable doing so.

As always, we continue to count on you, our dance community, to act responsibly. Dancers should not attend a dance if they are feeling ill, have recently tested positive for COVID-19 or recently been exposed to someone who has tested positive.