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November 5, 2020

To Tennessee County Mayors:

As the Thanksgiving holiday nears, Tennessee is experiencing a second large wave of new COVID-19 infections which is even more intense than the previous wave in July and August.

The physicians of Tennessee, as represented by the Tennessee Medical Association, **urgently request you to enact or extend mask requirement orders, especially if your county has higher numbers of new cases** (defined as over 10 new cases per 100,000 population per day averaged over the past seven days) to get the virus under better control prior to the upcoming holiday gatherings.

We have only a few ways to slow the virus, and among the most effective is the wearing of face coverings or masks in public. We appreciate Governor Bill Lee for extending his order allowing Tennessee County Mayors to enact mask requirement orders. Consistent with our prior recommendations outlined in our [July 8, 2020 letter to Tennessee County Mayors](#), **we ask those of you in high-risk counties with high case counts to please utilize this authority immediately.**

The purpose of wearing masks in public is to reduce airborne transmission of coronavirus from the mask wearer to others by capturing infectious respiratory droplets to prevent spread, especially to those who are more vulnerable and at risk of prolonged hospitalization or death if contracting the virus. Since many people are infectious with this virus and do not show symptoms, universal mask usage in public is one way to decrease the transmission of the virus.

Until we get an effective vaccine, masks are the best prevention we have to slow the spread of COVID-19, prevent our county hospitals and medical systems from becoming overwhelmed, and avoid unnecessary deaths.

Increasingly, evidence indicates that mask requirement orders increase actual mask-wearing by the public and decrease new cases of COVID-19:

- Recent estimations from the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation indicate a 70.5% mask usage rate in states with mask requirement orders versus a 58.1% usage rate in states without orders as of October 24, 2020.
- Even with this modest increase in mask usage, data indicate that states with mask orders have a lower rate of new cases/100K/day at 20.7 compared to states without such orders at 38.1 as of October 24, 2020 (a 45.7% decrease in cases).
- A [recently updated study from Vanderbilt](#) dated October 27, 2020 continues to show that areas without mask requirements have increases in hospitalizations compared to those with mask requirements.

As our ICU and hospital capacities become strained and deaths increase with the recent surge in cases, mask requirements appear to protect our ability to care for all sick patients, including those with and without COVID-19.

The TMA has [asked the people of Tennessee to wear masks](#), and we ask you to help this effort by issuing or extending mask requirements in counties currently meeting the criteria of over 10 new cases/100k/day, which includes all Tennessee counties as of November 3, 2020.

For your reference, we continue to update weekly color-coded [maps indicating the number of new cases](#) per day by population for each Tennessee county; counties in red or darker shades of red or black on these maps indicate our threshold for recommending mask requirement orders with over 10 new cases/100K/day.

Everyone needs to work together to slow this virus now, so we can hope to enjoy the upcoming holidays with our families and friends. Thank you for your consideration of this request and for all you are doing to protect and guide your citizens during this pandemic.

If we can provide any further information or guidance, please do not hesitate to contact us.



M. Kevin Smith, MD, PhD, MACP  
President, Tennessee Medical Association  
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