UNMC Statement on Face Mask Mandates
November 23, 2020

Cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) remain at dangerously high levels in Nebraska as of November 23, 2020. Communities must take action to suppress transmission to prevent excess deaths and hospitalizations that are stressing our hospitals to their breaking point. The available scientific evidence clearly shows that mask mandates can significantly reduce community transmission of COVID, particularly when they are enacted as part of a broader suite of community non-pharmaceutical interventions. Therefore, ordinances mandating the wearing of face masks outside of one’s home are a low-cost, effective tool that can help communities protect vulnerable populations, health system function, and economic vitality.

The consensus of infectious disease and public health experts continues to strengthen in support of the efficacy of face masks, including multi-layered cloth masks, for reducing community transmission of COVID-19. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has published a scientific brief documenting the role of face masks in COVID-19 transmission, citing 45 supporting papers and studies.

Recently, a team of researchers examined Kansas counties that adopted a state mandatory face mask ordinance in early July compared to counties that opted out. Over a six-week period, counties that opted out saw a 100% increase in COVID-19 cases. Counties that enacted the mandate experienced a 6% reduction in cases, despite starting at much higher rates of community transmission. Finally, a study by Goldman Sachs economists showed that face mask mandates improve compliance, reduce cases, and reduce negative economic consequences in communities.

In conclusion, the public health and infectious disease experts in the Global Center for Health Security at the University of Nebraska Medical Center agree that mandatory, universal face mask use is an effective tool for reducing community transmission of COVID-19. Mask mandates should be used in a layered combination of community non-pharmaceutical interventions in order to create the largest reduction in COVID-19 cases.

Christopher Kratochvil, MD
Executive Director of Clinical Research
Global Center for Health Security

James V. Lawler, MD, MPH
Executive Director of International Programs and Innovation
Global Center for Health Security

John Lower, PhD
Executive Director of Training and Education
Global Center for Health Security

Shelly Schwedhelm, MSN, RN, NEA-BC
Executive Director of Emergency Management and Clinical Operations
Global Center for Health Security

Kenneth Bayles, PhD
Executive Director Basic Science Research
Global Center for Health Security

2. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6947e2.htm?s_cid=mm6947e2_w

Global Center for Health Security
987878 Nebraska Medical Center, DGC | Omaha, NE 68198-6161 | 402.836.9911 | gcshs@unmc.edu
unmc.edu/healthsecurity