



May 18, 2020

To: City and County Managers and Mayors

From: John Douglas, Jr., MD, Executive Director, Tri-County Health Department

Re: Supporting Our Local Governments in Implementing Masking Requirements

Dear City and County Managers and Mayors:

With the extension this weekend by the Governor of his Order requiring workers in essential businesses and critical government jobs to wear face masks at least until mid-June, the issue of wearing face masks continues to be in the news (<https://www.denverpost.com/2020/05/17/colorado-masks-essential-workers-coronavirus-covid/>). The article notes that at least 15 cities and counties across Colorado also mandate use of face masks by the general public. Since some of you have asked about the position of Tri-County Health Department on the use of masks, I wanted to take this opportunity to clarify our thinking.

It is important to note that national guidance on the use of face masks has evolved over the past few months. Originally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintained that only those who are sick would benefit from face masks, advice based in large part on the shortage of PPE for first responders and health care providers. However, there is growing data that the number of asymptomatic people – those infected with the virus but showing no symptoms – is far greater than originally thought, significantly increasing the risk of spread as these individuals engage in everyday activities without the extra precautions a sick person would take. While the level of protection that cloth face coverings provide to a wearer is still uncertain, we know that they do serve as a barrier to nose and mouth aerosol droplets expelled by people as they breathe and talk and are thus likely to reduce transmission to others from an asymptotically infected person. It is estimated based on studies available that anywhere from 10% to 65% of people tested for COVID-19 were asymptomatic or presymptomatic when tested and that transmission from such persons may be responsible for over 40% of new cases of COVID. For these reasons, the [CDC now encourages](#) the wearing of cloth face coverings by the general public in public spaces.

TCHD agrees with the CDC recommendation and believes that broad public use of face masks can be useful, in conjunction with other prevention strategies such as social distancing and frequent handwashing, and remaining isolated when sick. While at this point TCHD has not issued a public health order to require the use of face masks, there are several reasons for this decision. First, in observational surveys carried out over the past two weeks by TCHD staff across Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas counties, we found on average that approximately 75 percent or more of the public are wearing masks when shopping, despite limited public education to date. In addition, while there is currently no evidence that the use of mandates requiring face coverings has increased compliance among the public, there is reason to believe that such mandates can be socially divisive.

We will continue to monitor compliance by the public with the use of masks and will consider a mandate if mask wearing does not remain high. In addition, we have launched a broad public health campaign to educate and increase the adherence to COVID-19 prevention measures including wearing masks in conjunction with social distancing, hand hygiene and isolating when sick.

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We do want to make clear that we fully support any of our local governments who choose to implement masking requirements if they believe that such can be helpful in their jurisdiction. TCHD believes that our local governments are often in the best position to bring the necessary stakeholders to the table to implement measures that encourage compliance with the use of face coverings to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

Thank you for all that you continue to do to protect the health of your communities during this historic pandemic. We look forward to working with you to maintain the health of our residents as we re-open our businesses and community activities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John M. Douglas, Jr., MD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials "MD" clearly visible at the end.

John M. Douglas, Jr., MD
Executive Director