



# JEFFERSON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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**Mark E. Wilson, MD**

Health Officer

August 19, 2021

**To: Owners and Operators of Indoor Public Spaces**

**Re: Call to Action to Promote use of Face Coverings**

Our community needs your help. Our hospitals and health care workers need your help. In the last several weeks we have seen a dramatic increase in the numbers of adults and children getting infected with COVID-19. Now our hospitals are facing a critical shortage of beds, as well as shortages in health care workers to care for the sick. Absenteeism related to COVID-19 is a growing problem for health care providers as well as other businesses and schools. It is all expected to get worse in the coming weeks.

While we continue to encourage people to get vaccinated against COVID-19, we need to take more immediate action to reduce the spread of the virus. We know that wearing face masks helps to reduce the spread of the virus. Today I am issuing an urgent "Call to Action" with recommendations for the wearing of face coverings (masks) in indoor public spaces for just one month. These are not orders. However, I am pleading with you to do what you can to help protect our community, and help our hospitals be able to provide care for anyone who needs it, whether they have COVID or some other medical problem.

The request is simple: ***For the next month, require or strongly recommend the use of face coverings in indoor spaces where people from different households come in contact with each other. Place signs notifying people of that requirement or strong recommendation at each entrance.*** The formal recommendations attached are written to provide more details, including the "why, where and how."

I know people are tired of face masks and other inconveniences in their lives related to this pandemic. We all want to get back to normal, but right now we are in an emergency situation.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'ME Wilson MD'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark E. Wilson, MD

**\*\*\*CALL TO ACTION\*\*\***  
**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JEFFERSON COUNTY HEALTH OFFICER**  
**FOR THE WEARING OF FACE COVERINGS**  
**IN INDOOR PUBLIC PLACES**

**AUGUST 19, 2021**

**WHEREAS:**

- Jefferson County is currently designated as an area of high community transmission of COVID-19 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [1] and the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH).
- Jefferson County is experiencing a high and rapidly increasing number of hospitalizations related to COVID-19.
- Jefferson County is also experiencing an increase in pediatric COVID-19 cases requiring hospitalization.
- The current surge of new COVID-19 cases is almost entirely due to the Delta variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is more contagious than previous variants of the virus.
- The number of COVID-19-related hospitalizations in Alabama and in Jefferson County is rapidly rising, and may soon reach a point where people are unable to receive the hospital care they need for COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 related medical conditions.
- On August 13, 2021, Governor Kay Ivey, on the recommendation of the State Health Officer and pursuant to relevant provisions of the Alabama Emergency Act of 1955 as amended, Ala. Code §§ 31-9-1, *et seq.*, declared that a state public health emergency exists in the State of Alabama for COVID-19 disease.
- While COVID-19 vaccinations have been highly effective at preventing hospitalization and death from COVID-19, infection can still occur in persons who have received COVID-19 vaccination, and it has been determined that vaccinated persons can spread the virus to other persons.
- COVID-19 infection is usually spread to others via the respiratory route, and this can occur even in the absence of symptoms.
- It is well established by multiple studies [2] that face coverings reduce the spread of COVID-19; they protect the wearer and those around the wearer from potential exposure.
- On August 3, 2021, the Jefferson County Health Officer strongly urged all public and private K-12 schools in Jefferson County to adopt policies in accordance with the Alabama Department of Public Health “Back-to-School Guidance” dated July 30, 2021, which recommends that schools “require masks and social distancing to open schools safely.”
- While precautions to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus within schools is critically important for protecting children and keeping them in school, and for reducing overall community spread of the virus, the Jefferson County Health Officer believes that precautions within schools need to be coupled with precautions outside the schools.
- The Jefferson County Health Officer believes that extensive, county-wide use of face coverings in indoor spaces where people from different households interact, is urgently

needed to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus and thereby reduce the number of COVID-19-related hospitalizations in the next several weeks.

**NOW, THEREFORE, THESE PREMISES CONSIDERED**, the following **Recommendation** for the wearing of *Face Coverings*, effective Friday, August 20, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

1. **Definition of Face Covering / Mask**: A device to cover the nose and mouth of a person to impede the spread of respiratory droplets and aerosols which can carry the COVID-19 virus through the air. Coverings may be fashioned from various materials. The face covering must cover the mouth and nose of the wearer. Cloth masks should have two or more layers of breathable fabric; they should fit snugly against the sides of the face and not have gaps around the edges. Masks with nose wires help prevent air from leaking out of the top of the mask. The effectiveness of face shields is unknown at this time. See the CDC's "Your Guide to Masks" [3] for further guidance.
2. **Face Coverings in Public Places**: It is recommended that owners or operators of businesses or venues open to the general public within Jefferson County require or strongly recommend that all persons over the age of 2 years wear face coverings or masks while in their indoor spaces, including but not limited to stores, bars and restaurants (except while eating or drinking), public meeting spaces, government buildings, civic centers, entertainment venues, etc.
3. **Places of Worship**: Face coverings are also recommended for situations within places of worship where people from different households are unable to or unlikely to maintain a distance of six (6) feet from each other. However, a combination of distancing and use of face coverings provides an additive level of safety. Face coverings are strongly recommended for congregants while singing together, as this poses a high level of risk for the spread of the COVID-19 virus.
4. **Daycares and Childcare Establishments**: It is recommended that daycares and other childcare establishments follow the CDC COVID-19 Guidance for Operating Early Care and Education/Child Care Programs. This guidance recommends that everyone 2 years and older wear a mask covering their mouth and nose when around people who do not live in their household, except when eating or sleeping.
5. **K-12 Schools**: Note that a recommendation in accordance with the ADPH "Back-to-School Guidance" was made previously on August 3, 2021, and this still stands.
6. **Private Business Spaces Not Open to the General Public**: It is recommended that business owners, managers, and supervisors shall develop their own policies and procedures regarding face coverings for employees in accordance with CDC guidance.
7. **Effective Communication**: A reasonable exception to a requirement or recommendation to wear a face covering would be when a person who is hearing-impaired needs to see the mouth of someone wearing a face covering to communicate. Another exception could be for a person speaking to a large group of people, where the face covering may make it difficult for others to understand the speaker, provided the speaker can stay at least 6 feet away from other persons.

8. **Notices:** It is recommended that businesses and venues open to the general public post a notice at all public entrances of their establishment, stating that face coverings are required or strongly recommended inside the establishment.

9. **Duration:** This Call to Action/Recommendation shall be in effect until Sunday, September 19, 2021, at 5:00 p.m., or when Jefferson County is no longer an area of substantial or high community transmission of COVID-19, whichever occurs first.

Signed on this 19<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2021.



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Mark E. Wilson, M.D.

Jefferson County Health Officer

References:

1. CDC: COVID Data Tracker, updated daily: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>
2. CDC: Science Brief: Community Use of Cloth Masks to Control the Spread of SARS-CoV-2, updated May 7, 2021: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/masking-science-sars-cov2.html>
3. CDC: Your Guide to Masks, updated August 13, 2021: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>