

Good morning commissioners, my name is Dr Rebekah Bernard, the incoming president of the Collier County Medical Society, and I am speaking on behalf of the board of directors of the Medical Society.

We stand with our colleagues at the Florida Medical Association to ask you today to enact facial covering requirements for indoor, public spaces to help protect our community and prevent further spread of COVID19.

We launched a petition to generate physician response to a mask mandate, and because it was such a hot-button issue now non-physicians have begun signing it as well. Total signature count since Friday morning is close to 700. The count of another petition we've been tracking, which also request requests a mask requirement in Collier County has over 1200 signatures.

Early recommendations by the CDC advised against the use of masks by the public due to a shortage of masks for healthcare workers. However, there is now evidence that the use of non-medical grade face coverings can reduce the transmission of virus by those who have COVID19 but don't yet know it. The science is clear. Infected individuals, even if not showing symptoms, can release infectious aerosol particles while breathing and speaking. Wearing a cloth mask decreases the chance of droplet exposure and limits the distance that escaping virus can travel.

Many businesses are requiring their employees to wear masks to protect customers. However, these same employees are at risk when customers do not follow the same recommendations. I recently spoke to one of my patients who works at a large retail company who is terrified that she will bring home the virus to her immune-compromised daughter. She tearfully told me that many of her customers do not wear masks and have even coughed or sneezed in proximity to her. She told me that she is unable to stay home from work because she relies on the income to provide for her family. By asking all customers to wear masks, we can protect our essential employees and their families.

While wearing masks can feel uncomfortable, they do not cause serious health hazards for most people. An alternative for people who are unable to wear a mask due to a medical condition would be to wear a plastic face shield to block droplet spread.

CCMS stands ready to serve residents and visitors in Southwest Florida. We are here to answer your questions and provide support as we continue to learn the best ways to fight this pandemic. IN addition to wearing a mask while indoors within proximity to others, we urge the public to maintain physical distancing and to wash or sanitize your hands frequently.

Thank you Commissioners, and all our neighbors, for your support of healthcare workers and first responders. We are confident that we can do better together as a united community to protect us all. Thank you for your time and consideration.