

CCMS Testimony to Board of Collier County Commissioners Special Meeting 6/30/2020

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

We ask you today to enact mask and facial covering requirements for indoor, public spaces, and to enact strategic beach restrictions similar to your actions for the Memorial Day weekend, to help protect our community and prevent further spread of COVID19.

There is no doubt that cases of COVID19 are on the rise in Collier County, and our positivity rate remains high. The increasing numbers of younger people infected are a concern to us, when they can easily, unknowingly transmit the virus to those who are vulnerable. Stronger measures are needed until we can see a consistent reduction in that positivity rate for an extended amount of time.

We stand with our colleagues at the Florida Medical Association who also recommend that local officials adopt regulations requiring the use of masks and face coverings.

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 by the public can reduce the risk of people who have COVID19, but don't yet know it, transmitting the virus to others. The science is clear. Infected individuals, even if not showing symptoms, can release infectious aerosol particles while breathing and speaking.

While non-medical grade face coverings are not 100% effective in reducing the spread of viral particles, they can significantly reduce the load of virus that we transmit to others. It seems that with this particular coronavirus, the more "viral load" a person is exposed to, the more serious their illness. Wearing a cloth mask decreases the chance of droplet exposure and limits the distance that escaping virus can travel. Wearing masks can feel uncomfortable, but they do not cause serious health hazards in the vast majority of people.

Additionally, our beaches are a significant tourist draw, and with the upcoming holiday weekend, it is likely we would see much-increased crowd levels that would make it very difficult to enforce proper physical distancing. We encourage you to consider the beach closures enacted on the east coast of Florida, while allowing time for those in our own community to take advantage of this natural resource.

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. We urge the public to maintain physical distancing, limit interactions outside your homes, and to wear face coverings when in enclosed spaces or within 6 feet of other people. It is not a great sacrifice to protect your health and the health of everyone around you, when we are dealing with a deadly, highly-contagious virus that is new to us.

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.