



## UNMC Statement on Face Mask Mandates February 2, 2021

Cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Nebraska have reduced to levels last seen in early October 2020, hospitalization levels remain high but have also lowered to levels last seen in late October 2020 and Nebraska deaths have eased to levels last seen in November 2020. The easing of these key COVID-19 indicators are encouraging and indicate that preventative measures implemented during the October through December months were impactful. That being said, the current disease levels remain concerning and have the same potential for explosive growth in cases, hospitalizations and deaths if community prevention measures are relaxed. Communities must continue to take action to suppress transmission to prevent excess deaths and hospitalizations that have stressed our hospitals to their breaking point for over four months. The available scientific evidence clearly shows that mask mandates can significantly reduce community transmission of COVID and are particularly important community prevention measures as we face a rise in infections of COVID-19 variants from the UK, South Africa and Brazil that have been characterized as more infectious than the virus Nebraska has battled to date. Therefore, ordinances mandating the wearing of face masks outside of one's home are a low-cost and effective tool that can help communities protect vulnerable populations, health system function, and economic vitality even as more easily transmitted viruses take hold in our community.

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.<sup>1</sup> Recently, a team of leading U.S. researchers examined the breadth of evidence and found a "preponderance of evidence indicates that mask wearing reduces transmissibility" of virus and strongly recommended widespread use of and regulations for widespread mask use published in the Proceedings of the U.S. National Academy of Science.<sup>2</sup> Many population centers across Nebraska enacted mask ordinances in late fall that contributed to the reduction of COVID-19 infections and reaped the benefits outlined in the Goldman Sachs economists study of improved community compliance, reduced cases, and reduced negative economic consequences in communities by avoiding shut downs and school closures.<sup>3</sup>

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 especially when faced with the threat of more infectious coronavirus variants taking hold in our communities. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/masking-science-sars-cov2.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pnas.org/content/118/4/e2014564118.short>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/pages/face-masks-and-gdp.html>