

7.24.20

Dear Kansas City metropolitan community,

The Health Officers and Health Directors of the Kansas City metropolitan Core 4 jurisdictions have been meeting regularly and making every effort to preserve the health of our communities over the last 4 1/2 months. As a group, we are thankful to have seen prior efforts successfully mitigate some impacts of this pandemic. Unfortunately, recent data suggests that we are now again losing the battle with COVID-19.

We are seeing a dramatic increase in the number of new cases across the entire metropolitan area, and our front-line workers are having difficulty keeping up with the vast and increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases. Each case requires disease investigation, contact tracing, and educational support for those affected by COVID-19. In addition to swiftly increasing cases, we are also seeing the number of hospitalized patients with COVID-19 increase dramatically. In fact, data from hospitals across the region show that the number of patients admitted for complications from the virus is at an all-time high. The number of hospitalized patients is higher than the numbers we saw in March and April.

Access to hospitalization information is an important part of monitoring COVID-19, but pulling together these data from hospitals across the bi-state region has been challenging. This matters because KC residents from around the region are often hospitalized in jurisdictions outside those in which they reside. Hospitals began reporting this information to a new federal system in June. Last week, however, the hospital data stream became unavailable based on decisions made at the Federal level. This decision has hobbled the efforts of local medical officers and front-line workers to track the spread of COVID-19 and respond accordingly to our region's needs.

Having learned these disturbing facts, we believe we must work more closely together than ever to make every effort to slow the spread and reverse the impact of this virus on the health of Kansas City residents. We are extremely concerned that hospitalizations will continue to escalate in the coming weeks

and months, and that the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 will lead to increasing ventilator use and deaths. Despite hoping this would not occur, we predicted that this was a possibility at some point after the relaxation of the stay-at-home orders.

Current mask-wearing mandates are an extremely important part of our efforts to once again flatten the curve.

We must work together and encourage all of our communities to make mask-wearing indoors, and when social distancing cannot be guaranteed, the “new normal.” This is our best option right now for protecting our friends, families, neighbors, and the economy. Research from Goldman Sachs suggests a national mask mandate would slow the growth rate of new COVID-19 infections and prevent a 5% GDP loss caused by additional lockdown measures.

The researchers go on to estimate that a national mandate would increase the portion of people wearing masks by 15 percentage points and cut the daily growth of new cases by 1.0 percentage point to 0.6%. Reducing the spread of the virus through mask-wearing, the analysts found, could be a substitute for strict lockdown measures that would otherwise shave \$1 trillion off the U.S. GDP.¹

If we do not act quickly as a community and region, future shutdowns will be inevitable. It may be important in the coming days to limit the interactions of individuals in bars, restaurants, and other indoor shopping venues – particularly where masks cannot be worn when eating and drinking.

We prefer these businesses provide patrons with curbside or outdoor service whenever and wherever possible as they have done before. We support creative ideas such as serving patrons in new outdoor spaces such as car-side in parking lots, or on sidewalks wherever possible.

Regional health officers and department directors will continue to work together, but we need your help too. The efforts we make in mask-wearing, social distancing, and restricting our overall interactions with others now,

¹ Hansen, Sara (2020). A national mask mandate could save the U.S. economy \$1 trillion, Goldman Sachs says. *Forbes*, online. doi: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahhansen/2020/06/30/a-national-mask-mandate-could-save-the-us-economy-1-trillion-goldman-sachs-says/#1a12c39d56f1>

especially when indoors, may help us avoid further shutdowns. We must all do what we can in the hope that tighter restrictions will not be necessary.

We will continue working together diligently to analyze data and attempt joint decision making whenever possible across the metropolitan area. We appreciate the support of our residents and those who realize that we are truly one metropolitan community. By being sensible and working together, we will save lives and build new models for ensuring the future health of our community, while preserving the people and things we hold most dear.

Thank you for your support and attention to these serious public health efforts.

Sincerely,

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