



August 5, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
The White House
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Vice President Pence:

We write on behalf of the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) and the HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA) to thank you for your ongoing leadership in our nation's COVID-19 response and to urge the White House Coronavirus Task Force to adopt a uniform policy about mask wearing to control the pandemic, protect the economy and allow for the safe reopening of schools. IDSA and HIVMA represent over 12,000 infectious diseases and HIV physicians, scientists, and other health care and public health professionals on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response. **Specifically, we urge you to publicly issue a strong federal directive calling for mask requirements in all states, to launch a public education campaign about the importance of wearing masks or face coverings, and to require all individuals in the White House complex to wear a mask at all times when they are in the company of others, both for their own protection and to serve as role models for our country.**

In March, the White House Coronavirus Task Force took decisive and effective action in launching the *15 Days to Slow the Spread* campaign that provided strong and consistent guidance to everyone in the country on how to protect themselves, their families and their communities. As our country approaches 5 million COVID-19 cases and 160,000 deaths, **unified national action is again urgently needed to save lives.** As we quickly approach influenza season, we have a critical window of time to reduce the rapid spread of COVID-19 cases across the country through universal masking and physical distancing. If we fail to dramatically curtail transmission, it is likely that hospitals will become overwhelmed and lives will be lost due to a shortage of ICU beds, ventilators and other essential equipment. In addition, a significant reduction in cases will spur public confidence in the safety of our communities, greatly increasing the number of people who will feel comfortable patronizing businesses and supporting the economy.

National Masking & Social Distancing Requirements: We strongly support the July 14 White House Coronavirus Task Force report to governors that recommended that states with more than 100 new cases per 100,000 population in the previous week should ask residents to wear masks at all times, limit social gatherings to 10 people or fewer, and close bars and gyms.

Strong and consistent national policy and messaging makes a difference. One report indicates that use of face coverings increased following the April 3, 2020, announcement by the White House Coronavirus Task Force and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that recommended their adoption in

public to slow the spread of COVID-19.¹ We strongly urge you to call for all states to require individuals to wear masks when outside the home, including in outdoor settings when physical distancing of 6 feet cannot be maintained, with exceptions for those for whom masks are medically or developmentally inappropriate.

Educate the Public: In addition, we encourage you to launch a public education campaign to help everyone understand the importance and effectiveness of wearing masks and the proper way to wear them. Clear, consistent messaging from our nation’s highest leaders and trusted health experts is essential to normalize masking as we have normalized other critical health and safety measures, such as wearing seatbelts and bicycle helmets. By requiring masks within the White House complex, you can protect the health and safety of our nation’s leaders and lead by the power of example.

Save Lives & Keep the Economy Open: Compelling scientific data indicate that masks are highly effective at preventing the spread of COVID-19 and should be worn by everyone, as asymptomatic transmission is a critical driver in this pandemic.² An analysis published by Goldman Sachs Research suggests that expanding community masking by 15% could prevent the need to bring back stay-at-home orders that would otherwise cost an estimated 5% of gross domestic product, or a projected cost of \$1 trillion.³ While state and local requirements are particularly effective at increasing the use of masks, this is the time for national solidarity as COVID-19 has made significant inroads into rural areas that were initially considered ‘safe’.

Policies to greatly increase the use of masks are integral to a broader national strategy to control the COVID-19 pandemic, which must also include increasing testing capacity and its timeliness to bolster the impact of contact tracing. Further, we must ensure the availability of personal protective equipment and other medical supplies; continue to support the discovery, development and equitable distribution of vaccines and therapeutics; and ensure a strong public health and infectious diseases workforce. We appreciate opportunities to work with you to strengthen the nation’s response.

Sincerely,



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Judith Feinberg, M.D., FIDSA
Chair, HIVMA

¹ Fisher KA, Barile JP, Guerin R, et al. Factors associated with cloth face covering use among adults during the COVID-19 pandemic—United States, April and May 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*. Published online July 14, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6928e3.htm?s_cid=mm6928e3_w

² Brooks JT, Butler JC, Redfield RR. Universal Masking to Prevent SARS-CoV-2 Transmission—The Time Is Now. *JAMA*. Published online July 14, 2020. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.13107 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2768532>

³ Hatzius J, Struyven D, Rosenberg I. Face Masks and GDP. Goldman Sachs Research. Published June 29, 2020. <https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/pages/face-masks-and-gdp.html>