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EL PASO COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY

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On behalf of the El Paso County Medical Society, we are writing this letter to document our support for the widespread use of masks in El Paso County and for the current recommendation to institute a 2-week stay-at-home order with the goal of reducing our current COVID 19 case trajectory.

El Paso has enjoyed several months of low case numbers and hospitalizations due to COVID-19 while other areas in Texas and the U.S. have suffered terrible surges. However, we feel that the relatively low community spread led to “COVID fatigue” and a sense of complacency that heralded our current numbers. The fact that El Paso’s positivity rate, hospitalizations and ICU admissions have continued to increase daily since the beginning of October to levels more than triple our previous highest numbers suggests we must do something different to stop this trend.

We, physicians, remain concerned that despite the high case numbers, there are a proportion of bars and restaurants continuing to offer dine-in services, large box stores with no one monitoring capacity and groups of families and friends who continue to meet indoors without masks. Additionally, we see lack of adequate testing for citizens or essential workers crossing the border that further contributes to our local case load.

We are now in an emergent situation with hospitals at surge capacity and many front-line health care workers exhausted or becoming patients themselves. If this pace continues, we will not be able to care for those that need medical services. It is necessary to hit the “pause” button and allow for case numbers to drop, hospitals and staff to regroup and city officials to decide what the next correct course of action should be. With a stay-at-home order, there are also fewer people on the streets and in stores, creating more favorable conditions for our hospitals (so as not to worry about accident victims needing ICU beds already being used by COVID 19 patients).

In the meantime, we advocate the following main principals to reduce risk of infection:

MASKS at all times outside of house or with at risk individuals

HAND WASHING frequently

DISTANCING 6-10 feet from other individuals

PROTECTING ANY PERSON AT RISK by limiting visits, even with family and friends, and by getting tested if you are experiencing symptoms or have come into contact with a COVID positive individual.

You have done an excellent job keeping El Pasoans safe and getting important info out to the public. We acknowledge that many mitigating actions may be difficult to enforce locally given the current TX executive order and Federal laws regulating the U.S.-Mexico Border. We support the work being done to bring more resources and medical personnel to El Paso at this critical time. We additionally acknowledge that a stay-at-home order may cause some economic hardship for many businesses and families, including some of our own.

Despite this, we honestly believe that if, as a city, we do not take this time to slow the curve again, we will have both economic loss and loss of life from which our community will have difficulty recovering.

Sincerely,

The El Paso County Medical Society Leadership