



September 16, 2021

To: Metropolitan Board of Health of Nashville and Davidson County

Members of the Board of Health,

At the Sept. 9 Board of Health meeting you had a lively discussion prompted by the Metro Council's adoption two days earlier of a resolution encouraging me to issue a county-wide indoor mask mandate.

The Metro Public Health Department continues to follow recommendations by the CDC. At present the CDC does not require mask mandates. It does strongly encourage the wearing of masks indoors. MPH D unequivocally agrees. Masks should be worn indoors in all public spaces in which people mingle in close quarters for more than a few minutes.

Mayor John Cooper has issued a mask mandate for all employees and visitors in Metro buildings. Immediately following that, the Davidson County Board of Education issued an indoor mask mandate for all students and staff. Many businesses have also followed suit by requiring employees and customers to show proof of vaccination and/or a negative COVID test. Venues, including Bridgestone Arena, have implemented the same precautions to attend events. MPH D strongly supports businesses that have chosen to implement these protections.

Any citizen who enters an establishment that does not require the wearing of masks should weigh carefully the risk they would be taking to enter.

Prior to the vaccine, masks and distancing were the only public health interventions available to us, which led to public health orders that included a county-wide mask mandate and capacity restrictions. MPH D phased out all restrictions shortly after an appropriate medical intervention -- the vaccines -- became widely available.

As valuable as masks are, the way through this pandemic is vaccination. This is made clear by President Biden's recent six-step COVID plan. That plan focuses heavily on vaccinations and testing. It mandates vaccination for many federal employees, and the president was expected to require, by executive order, the same of federal contractors. MPH D and many others in the community have worked ceaselessly for nearly a year now to get as many people vaccinated as possible and will continue to do so.

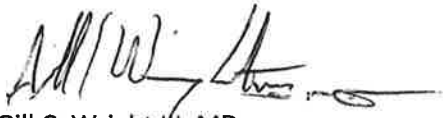
At this time the public health intervention is the vaccine. Vaccination is ultimately the way out. It is free. It is safe. It is readily available. And it is effective.

I have been asked what might trigger a mask mandate. We have all seen stories of hospitals stretched to the breaking point or even overrun by an influx of COVID cases. We are not to that point in Davidson County, but it is one condition that could require action. In such a case it would be a temporary measure intended to relieve pressure on the health care system. But we are not there.

A consideration for the effectiveness of a mask mandate on hospital stress in a county that serves as a regional health care center is that many of the COVID cases in Davidson County hospitals would not be touched by such a mandate; they are from surrounding counties. The inconsistency of COVID interventions across political jurisdictions has plagued the response in this country from the beginning, and continues to affect what any local entity can accomplish by itself.

I encourage everyone to wear a mask indoors when close contact with others cannot be avoided. I further, and emphatically so, encourage everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated. As of this writing 53.7 percent of Davidson County residents were fully vaccinated. We can do better. And when we do, we can put this nightmare behind us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gill C. Wright III, MD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Gill C. Wright III, MD
Director of Health