



Bill McBride
Executive Director
National Governors Association
444 North Capitol Street, Suite 267
Washington, D.C. 20001

April 10, 2020

Dear Mr. McBride,

On behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), I am writing today to the leaders of all states to urge you to enact and maintain key public health measures to slow the spread of COVID-19.

AAFA is the leading patient organization advocating for people with asthma and allergies, and the oldest asthma and allergy patient group in the world. One in thirteen Americans – nearly 25 million people – are living with asthma.¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined that people with moderate or severe asthma may be at higher risk of serious illness due to COVID-19.² Preliminary analysis of U.S. COVID-19 cases with data available on underlying conditions indeed reflects that people with chronic lung disease, including asthma, are among those at higher risk of severe disease.³ Over 4 million Americans living with asthma are also 65 years old or older,⁴ likely rendering them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 complications and death.

We are deeply concerned for the safety of our patient community. And we are deeply concerned about the fate of all Americans – and others around the globe - in the path of the epidemic we are facing. We therefore urge all governors to institute the following:

1. Enforce social distancing

We urge all states to enact and strictly enforce measures that implement social distancing guidelines from the CDC.⁵ Deliberately creating physical space between individuals to avoid spreading or

¹ CDC, “Most Recent National Asthma Data” (Updated March 24, 2020). Available at https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/most_recent_national_asthma_data.htm

² CDC, “People with Moderate to Severe Asthma” (April 2, 2020). Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/asthma.html>

³ CDC, “Preliminary Estimates of the Prevalence of Selected Underlying Health Conditions Among Patients with Coronavirus Disease 2019 — United States, February 12–March 28, 2020” (April 3, 2020), *MMWR*, 69(13):382-386. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6913e2.htm>

⁴ CDC, “Most Recent National Asthma Data” (Updated March 24, 2020). Available at https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/most_recent_national_asthma_data.htm

⁵ CDC, “Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation” (Updated April 4, 2020). Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>



catching COVID-19 saves lives. Models show that measures such as social distancing can bring down the infection curve and prevent devastating losses of life — but only if they are rigorously followed.⁶

As of April 6, 43 states and Washington, D.C. have issued stay-at-home or shelter-in-place directives, a strict form of social distancing, with exceptions only for essential services like grocery shopping and trips to the pharmacy.⁷ Early data suggests that social distancing may be helping flatten the curve in jurisdictions with early and strict measures.⁸ However, some states still do not have stay-at-home orders in place.⁹

AAFA applauds the efforts of states with strong measures, and urges all governors to issue mandatory stay-at-home orders to prevent further spread of the virus. These orders should not be lifted for political reasons, but should remain in place until guidance based on data and science provide a plan for a return to normal operations.

2. Encourage mask wearing in accordance with CDC recommendations

There is a growing body of evidence that wearing any kind of face mask can mitigate the spread of respiratory infections through droplets.¹⁰ In addition, there is now clear scientific consensus that people can transmit COVID-19 even if they have very mild symptoms or before they develop any symptoms. Masks would reduce the chance that these seemingly healthy people transmit the virus to others in the community. Furthermore, countries with a social norm around universal mask wearing in the context of a respiratory epidemic have seen far better control of their COVID epidemics to date.¹¹

On April 3, the CDC issued a formal recommendation to the public in favor of “wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) **especially** in areas of significant community-based transmission”¹²

⁶ IHME, “COVID-19 Projections” (Updated April 8, 2020). Available at: <https://covid19.healthdata.org/united-states-of-america>

⁷ Silverstein, Jason, “43 states now have stay-at-home orders for coronavirus. These are the 7 that don't” (April 6, 2020), *CBS News*. Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/stay-at-home-orders-states/>

⁸ Geoffrey A. Fowler, Heather Kelly, and Reed Albergotti. “Social distancing works. The earlier the better, California and Washington data show.” *Washington Post* (April 1, 2020). Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/04/01/lockdown-coronavirus-california-data/>

⁹ Adolph, Christopher et. al., “Pandemic Politics: Timing State-Level Social Distancing Responses to COVID-19” (March 28, 2020) *University of Washington*. Available at <https://faculty.washington.edu/cadolph/papers/AABFW2020.pdf>.

¹⁰ Liu, Xiaopeng and Sisen Zhang, “COVID-19: Face masks and human-to-human transmission” (March 29, 2020), *ISIRV*. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/irv.12740>; Feng, Shuo, et al, “Rational use of face masks in the COVID-19 pandemic” (March 20, 2020), *The Lancet*. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(20\)30134-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(20)30134-X/fulltext)

¹¹ “Containing Coronavirus: Lessons from China” (Accessed April 10, 2020), *Financial Times*. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/e015e096-6532-11ea-a6cd-df28cc3c6a68>

¹² CDC, “Recommendation Regarding the Use of Cloth Face Coverings, Especially in Areas of Significant Community-Based Transmission” (April 3, 2020). Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover.html>



(emphasis in original). The CDC’s recommendation should be immediately incorporated into mask recommendations at the state level.

Such settings may vary depending on the state; in some, the requirement might only apply within essential businesses such as grocery stores and pharmacies; in places with high population density, cloth mask wearing may be warranted every time people leave their homes. Of course, a mask requirement can be revisited and adjusted or removed at any point based on evolving evidence, the availability of non-cloth masks, and the course of the epidemic.

Understandably, the public has been urged not to hoard and use N95 respirators, professional-grade masks that remain in appallingly short supply for healthcare providers and first responders providing medical care. Cloth masks, however, are a low-cost or free intervention that every individual can procure or fashion, and they can help to reduce community transmission of the virus. As the CDC notes, cloth masks can be sewn, but they can also be fashioned very simply out of cotton T-shirts or even bandanas.¹³

Masks pose no known health risk to the wearer,¹⁴ and can be provided at little to no financial cost. In fact, a recent analysis by Yale economics and medical experts found that if universal mask wearing leads to a 10 percent decline in transmission, *each* cloth mask worn by the public would yield between \$3,000-\$6,000 in savings due to reduced mortality.¹⁵

Conclusion

At this point, we have limited tools in our fight to flatten the COVID curve. We will continue to see healthcare systems across the country struggle in a deluge of patients. We should be using every possible lever to mitigate transmission and save lives. We urge you to follow the public health evidence by maintaining social distancing and promoting the use of masks.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Mendez
President and Chief Executive Officer
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

¹³ CDC, “Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19” (April 9, 2020). Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

¹⁴ Note, however, that masks are not recommended for children under 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. *Id.*

¹⁵ Abaluck, Jason, “The Case for Universal Cloth Mask Adoption and Policies to Increase Supply of Medical Masks for Health Worker” (April 6, 2020), *SSRN*, Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3567438#.XocMKTaw7pI.twitter