



To the Editor:

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, people have been urged to protect themselves, their neighbors, and their loved ones amidst the worst global health crisis in generations. After months of physical distancing and staying at home, infections and deaths began to decline across our country.

But in the weeks since states began reopening, some steps that were critical to the progress made were abandoned too quickly. We are now watching in real-time as a dramatic uptick in COVID-19 cases is erasing hard-won gains. In some states, hospitals are at or nearing their ICU capacity and shortages of personal protective equipment and testing supplies continue to pose a threat to health care workers and patients alike.

While North Dakota is not a high spread state, we want to do everything possible to keep it that way. This is why as physicians, nurses, long term care administrators, hospital and health system leaders, we urge North Dakotans to take the simple steps we know will help stop the spread of the virus: wearing a face mask, maintaining physical distancing, and washing hands. We are not powerless in this public health crisis, and we can defeat it in the same way we defeated previous threats to public health—by allowing science and evidence to shape our decisions and inform our actions.

There is a growing body of evidence that face masks help prevent the spread of COVID-19. One study shows the infection rate among employees at Mass General Brigham hospitals dropped significantly once all workers were required to wear face masks. Another study in Missouri shows that wearing a face mask prevented the spread of infection from two hair stylists to their customers.

Despite claims otherwise, the prolonged use of face masks when properly worn does not cause CO2 intoxication, oxygen deficiency, or any other harm to the wearer. Surgeons operate for hours wearing them. They don't have problems. For those who have been waiting for more data before accepting the practice, these findings make it clear: Masks work.

The toll of this pandemic is staggering, and it will take months, perhaps years, to truly understand its impact on our country and our way of life. But what is certain – and what the science and evidence tell us - is that COVID-19 is not behind us. Your actions are critical to stop the spread of COVID-19. We must remain vigilant and continue to take steps to mitigate the spread of the virus to protect each other and our loved ones.

To those of you who are doing your part in helping turn the tide of this pandemic – thank you. There is only one way we will get through this – together.

Your continued partners in health,

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