



November 19, 2020

Dear Tennessee residents:

The past several months have taken a toll on all of us, as we cope with the stress of quarantines, social distancing and other public health measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. We miss our friends and family, we miss concerts and other events, we miss seeing smiles that are hidden by masks when we are at the grocery store, and we are heartbroken to have lost so many to this horrible disease.

As clinicians in Tennessee hospitals, we feel it too. However, we are also impacted for other reasons. We are worried for our patients who were perfectly healthy just a week ago and are now dependent on a ventilator to breathe, saddened as we hold the phone while family members say their final goodbyes on FaceTime, and frustrated that simple steps that could greatly reduce the loss of life are not being embraced by all Tennesseans.

We, the Chief Medical Officers and Chief Nursing Officers across the state of Tennessee, are banding together in one unified voice to say masking makes a difference. While nothing short of total isolation completely eliminates the risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19, we, as medical professionals, know that wearing a mask and maintaining social distancing does greatly reduce the risk.

A cloth or surgical mask traps droplets that are released when the wearer talks, coughs or sneezes. These droplets are what spreads the virus between people. Containing the droplets helps stop the spread of COVID-19. More recent evidence further indicates that wearing a mask also protects the wearer by reducing the number of infectious droplets inhaled by the wearer. In other words, wearing a mask protects both you and those around you.

As clinicians in hospitals throughout the state, our goal is to be here when you need us, regardless of the type of care you are seeking. Unfortunately, COVID-19 hospitalizations in Tennessee are escalating at a rate that threatens to overwhelm the healthcare system and compromise our ability to do just that. We all need to do our part to make sure that doesn't happen, by wearing a mask and social distancing.

Together, we can protect our neighbors and ourselves and ensure healthcare services continue to be available when and where we need them.

Sincerely,

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