June 26th, 2020

I want to start by acknowledging how difficult these last few months have been for everyone. The emergence of this new virus has changed our everyday lives in so many ways and we are all grieving for the lives we took for granted just a few short months ago. Our ability to be with family and friends freely without restrictions or worry. Our ability to visit our loved ones in hospitals and other facilities. Our ability to work and provide for ourselves and our family. We have all been touched by this pandemic.

While we are all fatigued by months of sheltering and desperate to resume our normal social interactions, it is important to understand and acknowledge recent realities. We are seeing increased spread of coronavirus in our County. Close contact with people who do not live in the same household with you, whether related or not, increase the opportunities for this virus to spread. Maintaining a 6-foot social distance, face coverings, and frequent hand washing continue to be our best proven defense against transmitting and contracting the virus.

I want to take this opportunity to remind all of you that gatherings of all sizes continue to be prohibited under the Governor and State Public Health Officer’s Order except as permitted by recent state guidance. Unfortunately, in violation of this state directive, there are increased reports of home gatherings, birthday parties, graduation parties, shared celebrations and shared sorrows. Many times these are happening without taking the necessary precautions to decrease chances for this virus to spread.

Along with staying 6 feet away from all non-household members, wearing a face covering whenever you leave your residence decreases spread. CDC estimates that 40% of spread occurs BEFORE a person develops symptoms. It is common for a person to feel well and healthy but still be carrying and spreading the virus. Since no one can predict future illness, wearing a face covering is necessary to protect those around you and decrease spread.

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On May 20, 2020, Stanislaus County was granted a variance to open sectors more quickly than much of the rest of the state after meeting certain metrics to show our low rate of spread and readiness to respond. Due to the increased spread we have seen since then, we are being monitored by the state and need to demonstrate improvement or our variance may be revoked. Sectors that we have opened would have to close back down if the variance is revoked.

Rather than close businesses, increasing the number of people wearing a face covering will decrease spread and allow businesses to stay open in Stanislaus County. Strong recommendations from public health to wear a face covering when out in public were not effective. Consequently, we were moving forward with a Stanislaus County face covering order.

Last Thursday the California Department of Public Health put out guidance mandating face coverings when in indoor public spaces, superseding our plans. Please see the guidance for the definition of all areas where face coverings are required and various exceptions. https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/Guidance-for-Face-Coverings_06-18-2020.pdf.

As such, there is no longer a need for a local county order. Local orders can only be more restrictive than the state mandate and at this time we don’t feel that this is necessary. In order to keep our variance that allows certain businesses to be open, customers to frequent these businesses, and keep our residents working, we must all take these steps to stop spread:

- Always stay at least 6 feet from all people who do not live in the same residence.
- Always wear a face covering when out in public.

Together we can stop this virus from spreading. Thank you for doing your part.

Sincerely,

Dr. V