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Illinois Business and Healthcare Groups Encourage Use of Face Masks to Save Lives, Protect Jobs

SPRINGFIELD -- A diverse coalition of business groups renewed calls for Illinoisans to wear face masks when in public to save lives and protect the state's economy.

Recent data from the Illinois Department of Public Health show that the number of Illinoisans infected with COVID-19 and hospitalization rates have increased since Illinois moved to Phase 4 just over two weeks ago. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and numerous public health studies have demonstrated that masks are effective in slowing the spread of the virus by as much as 85 percent.

“Wearing masks is not a Republican issue or Democrat issue – it’s a public health issue and a jobs issue. We must unite for the sake of our families, businesses, and our communities,” **said Mark Denzler, president & CEO of the Illinois Manufacturers’ Association.** “We are facing the worst economic and health crisis in generations and every Illinoisan can wear a mask to help slow the spread of the pandemic. If we do not act strongly and quickly, we’ll see manufacturing facilities close and supply chain reductions that will impact consumers across the globe.”

While Governor JB Pritzker issued an order on May 1 directing Illinoisans to wear face coverings when outside the home and unable to socially distance from other individuals, compliance has been uneven. Both the Governor and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot have stated they would consider reverting to previous stages if the metrics increase, including the potential closure of businesses that only recently reopened.

“Retailers must interact with customers every single day and wearing a mask protects both the workers and customers,” **said Rob Karr, president & CEO of the Illinois Retail Merchants Association.** “Wearing a mask is a small act that will literally save lives and help protect one of the state’s largest economic engines. One case of COVID-19 can shut down a restaurant, movie theatre, or grocery store for weeks, threatening lives and livelihoods.”

“It’s very possible we could lose the progress Illinois has made against COVID-19 if people aren’t wearing masks in public,” **said Robert W. Pantan, MD, President of the Illinois State Medical Society.** “Not only is wearing a mask a best public health practice in the fight against this virus, doing so can heal Illinois’ economic condition by slowing the spread.”

“We are now seeing a dramatic and troubling surge in COVID-19 cases in many states, including some of our neighboring states, as well as an uptick in Illinois, threatening to erase the hard-won gains we have made in battling the pandemic,” **said Illinois Health and Hospital Association President & CEO A. J. Wilhelmi.** “That’s why hospitals that are on the frontlines providing life-saving care and supporting the reopening of our economy urge everyone to take a simple and proven step to help stop the spread of the virus – wear a face mask. Together, by protecting ourselves, our loved ones, and our neighbors, we will get through this.”

Other business organizations calling on Illinoisans to wear masks to protect Illinois' economic health and public safety include:

Associated Beer Distributors of Illinois
Chemical Industry Council of Illinois
Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce
Chicagoland Food & Beverage Network
Illinois Association of Aggregate Producers
Illinois Chamber of Commerce
Illinois Credit Union League
Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association
Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association
Illinois Petroleum Marketers Association
Illinois Trucking Association
Illinois Movers' and Warehouseman's Association
Mid-West Truckers Association
NFIB Illinois
The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce
Valley Industrial Association