

WHY WEAR A MASK IN CHURCH?

Why will I wear a mask in church starting this Sunday? Why are we recommending our entire congregation resume masking? For many people it is irritating and confusing to be asked to wear a mask again, so I will explain why it is important.

This spring we were told that if we were fully vaccinated against COVID 19 we could go without masks. On June 30 we were told that even if we were not vaccinated, masks were not mandated (but they were strongly encouraged). This was based on the data at that time that showed that it was very unlikely for vaccinated individuals to spread the virus if they got breakthrough asymptomatic infection. Also, the rate of COVID 19 cases was declining at that time.

So why did the CDC and OHA reverse course and recommend that both vaccinated and unvaccinated people wear masks in public spaces on July 26? A huge reason is the current rapid surge of COVID 19 infections and hospitalizations, plus the fact that the delta variant accounts for 80% of the cases. The delta variant is much more contagious, and recent studies show that a fully vaccinated individual can become infected with the delta variant and have no symptoms of COVID but still spread the virus to others. To me, this one fact is a game-changer.

It is important to understand that older individuals, especially 85 plus years old, are more susceptible to becoming infected and becoming very ill with COVID19, even if they are fully vaccinated, because they may not produce an optimum antibody level after receiving the vaccine, and the level may further diminish over time. This data came out of a recent study of post-vaccine antibody levels from OHSU. This does not diminish the importance for all individuals, including the older ones, to receive the vaccine as the best available protection against hospitalization and death.

I love singing in church, and I love singing in our church choir and projecting my voice. Recently I have been doing so without a mask. Now that I have fully considered all the above, I no longer feel that I should be singing without a mask, unless I am outside, even though I have been fully vaccinated. I want to be protective of the older folks and young kids in our congregation who cannot yet be vaccinated.

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