

COVID-19: A REVIEW OF MASK

APRIL 06, 2021

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, mask guidance has varied by state, county, expert, and organization. Most public health practitioners and institutions have now acknowledged the efficacy and importance of masks. During this pandemic, it has been no surprise that there is public confusion about what measures can effectively protect families and communities from COVID-19. Because the scientific and medical understanding of this disease is advancing so rapidly, we are learning what measures provide the greatest protection by minimizing the spread of COVID-19.

Establishing effective public policies are essential to help reduce transmission of the virus and save lives. States and counties have implemented measures such as curfews to minimize the movement of people, requiring face coverings, social distancing, and the avoidance of large crowds. These measures have been imitated with varying degrees of severity around the country as we continue to confront the pandemic.



Although there are different views as to the effectiveness of any one of these measures, it is evident by the information included in this document that a combination of restrictions, tailored to circumstances, are needed to prevent transmission of the virus.

Below, we have included five sections addressing masks: 1. Summary of Findings, 2. Recommendations from institutions on COVID-19 and Masks, 3. Actions taken from the Board of County Commissioners, 4. Data reflecting counties statewide, and 5. Survey results reflecting sentiment about Masks. We hope this document is useful as effective policies are being considered to reduce transmission and ensure families in our communities remain safe.

I. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Organizations, as well as the reports and studies included in this document, recommend wearing masks to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. They have found that face coverings reduce the spray of droplets produced during speaking, coughing, and sneezing.
- There is consensus among those organizations and reports included in this document that masks should be part of a comprehensive policy approach including other measures such as avoiding crowded, closed and close-contact settings; social distancing; and washing of hands.
- A report completed by the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) and the Centers for Disease and Prevention (CDC) showed mask effectiveness when comparing mask versus non-mask school districts. The report found higher rates among students in school districts without mandatory mask use policies.
- A recent study completed by the University of South Florida looking at how social interventions, and vaccinations are affecting the rate of new cases and the impact on hospitalizations, provided median predictions of the pandemic in the Tampa Bay Area.
- For the most part, counties in the Tampa Bay Area experienced a similar trend in cases and percent positivity as Pinellas County during the same period.
- Eighteen counties statewide currently have a countywide mask ordinance. A review of six of these counties with comparable population as Pinellas County indicates that the 7-day average of cases of these counties has fluctuated since the beginning of the pandemic. Current case count and percent positivity across these counties are still elevated (higher than what was seen when mask ordinances were put in place) and a reduction in numbers and increase in immune population should be considered as part of the policy discussion.
- A review of the percent positivity for counties in the Tampa Bay Area with a countywide mask as well as counties without a countywide mask ordinance was completed. It is important to note that the comments below, are purely observational and NOT a study – no statistical analysis was conducted.

- Counties with a countywide mask ordinance experienced a spike in June-July of 2020 followed by a steady decline. A second spike was experienced in December-January in the percent positivity, followed by another decline and most recently as of March of 2021 we are experiencing another increase.
- Counties with no countywide mask ordinance also seemed to follow a similar trend as counties with a countywide mask ordinance.
- A recent survey completed by Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) indicates that 70% of adults said they could continue adhering to social distancing guidelines for six months or more or until a vaccine is widely available. In addition, a survey distributed by Destination Analysts, found 76.1% of respondents agree that people should wear face masks when they are in public, which is down from 80.6% in July of last year. A similar sentiment was found in a survey completed by the Tampa Bay Partnership last year, indicating that 67% support a local mandatory face mask policy.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM INSTITUTIONS ON COVID-19 AND MASKS

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)

In a recent statement, the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that it has no plans to change its guidelines recommending the use of face masks made of cloth as new types of the Coronavirus spread, because mutated strains are transmitted the same way.

WHO officials stressed that masks should be used as part of an overall comprehensive strategy. "The cornerstone of the response in every country must be to find, isolate, test and care for every case and to trace and quarantine every contact", said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-masks>

Why should people wear masks?

Masks are a key measure to suppress transmission and save lives.

Masks should be used as part of a comprehensive '**Do it all!**' approach including physical distancing, avoiding crowded, closed and close-contact settings, good ventilation, cleaning hands, covering sneezes and coughs, and more.

Depending on the type, masks can be used for either protection of healthy persons or to prevent onward transmission.

What's new:

- In areas with community transmission, the WHO now advises that members of the general public aged 60 and older and those with underlying conditions should wear a medical mask in situations where physical distancing is not possible.
- The general public should wear non-medical masks where there is widespread transmission and when physical distancing is difficult, such as on public transport, in shops or in other confined or crowded environments.
- Additionally, the WHO has released new guidance on cloth masks, recommending that they consist of at least three layers of different materials: an inner layer being an absorbent material like cotton, a middle layer of non-woven materials such as polypropylene (for the filter) and an outer layer, which is a non-absorbent material such as a polyester or a polyester blend.

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)

Centers for Disease and Prevention (CDC) continue to recommend that people wear masks in public settings and when around people who do not live in your household, especially when other [social distancing](#) measures are difficult to maintain.

On March 5, 2021 CDC published a report <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/pdfs/mm7010e3-H.pdf> indicating the finding of policies that require universal mask use and restrict any on-premises restaurant dining as part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce exposure to and transmission of COVID-19.

The report indicates that between March 1 and Dec. 31 of last year, state-issued mask mandates applied in 2,313 (73.6%) of the 3,142 U.S. counties. The report examined two outcomes: 1. The daily percentage point growth rate of county-level COVID-19 cases and 2. county-level COVID-19 deaths. The report concluded that “mask mandates were associated with statistically significant decreases in county-level daily COVID-19 case and death growth rates within 20 days of implementation. It is worth noting that this study has been used by others such as naturalnews.com to prove that the benefit of wearing a mask (as indicated by this report) is not sufficient to require face covering.”

What you need to know

When you wear a mask, you protect others as well as yourself. [Masks work best when everyone wears one.](#)

A mask is NOT a substitute for [social distancing](#). Masks should still be worn in addition to staying at least 6 feet apart, especially when indoors around people who don't live in your household.

Masks should completely cover the nose **and** mouth and fit snugly against the sides of face without gaps.

Masks should be worn [any time you are traveling](#) on a plane, bus, train, or other form of public transportation traveling into, within, or out of the United States and in U.S. transportation hubs such as airports and stations.

People age 2 and older should wear masks in public settings and when around people who don't live in their household.

Wear a mask inside your home if someone you live with is sick with [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 or has tested positive for COVID-19.

Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use [hand sanitizer](#) with at least 60% alcohol after touching or removing your mask.

Masks may not be necessary when you are outside by yourself away from others, or with people who live in your household. However, some areas may have mask mandates while out in public, so please check the rules in your local area (such as in your city, county, or state). Additionally, check whether any federal mask mandates apply to where you will be going.

CDC continues to study the effectiveness of different types of masks and update our recommendations as new scientific evidence becomes available. The most recent scientific brief is available here: [Scientific Brief: Community Use of Cloth Masks to Control the Spread of SARS-CoV-2 | CDC](#)

CDC recently conducted a [study](#) in a laboratory that tested the performance of different mask combinations.

There are several easy methods to improve the performance of your mask. Visit CDC's [Improve the Fit and Filtration of Your Mask to Reduce the Spread of COVID-19](#) webpage to learn more.

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)

A report completed by Florida Department of Health (FDOH) and CDC looking at mask versus non-mask school districts found higher rates among students in school districts without mandatory mask use policies. A copy of this study can be found at this link <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/pdfs/mm7012e2-H.pdf>

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA (USF) – FORECASTING THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN TAMPA BAY

A recent study ([attached](#)) completed by the University of South Florida looking at how social interventions, and vaccinations are affecting the rate of new cases and the impact on hospitalizations, provided median predictions of the pandemic in the Tampa Bay Area. Below, we have included some of the key findings from the study.

- Latest data and both near- and long-term model forecasts indicate that the pandemic is entering a critical slowed down phase in Tampa
- Social measures are highly effective in protecting against infection and is the primary reason for the current state of the pandemic. However, it retards the development of herd immunity.
- Releasing current social measures before achievement of herd immunity will lead to pandemic resurgence
- Ramping up vaccination rates (5x) over the current rate will allow full release of social measures by July 1st, 2021
- Virus variants are still not playing a major role in transmission
- Continuing with social measures to end of summer (Aug 2021) while vaccinations are ramped up will be vital to prevent spread of new variants

III. ACTION TAKEN: BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

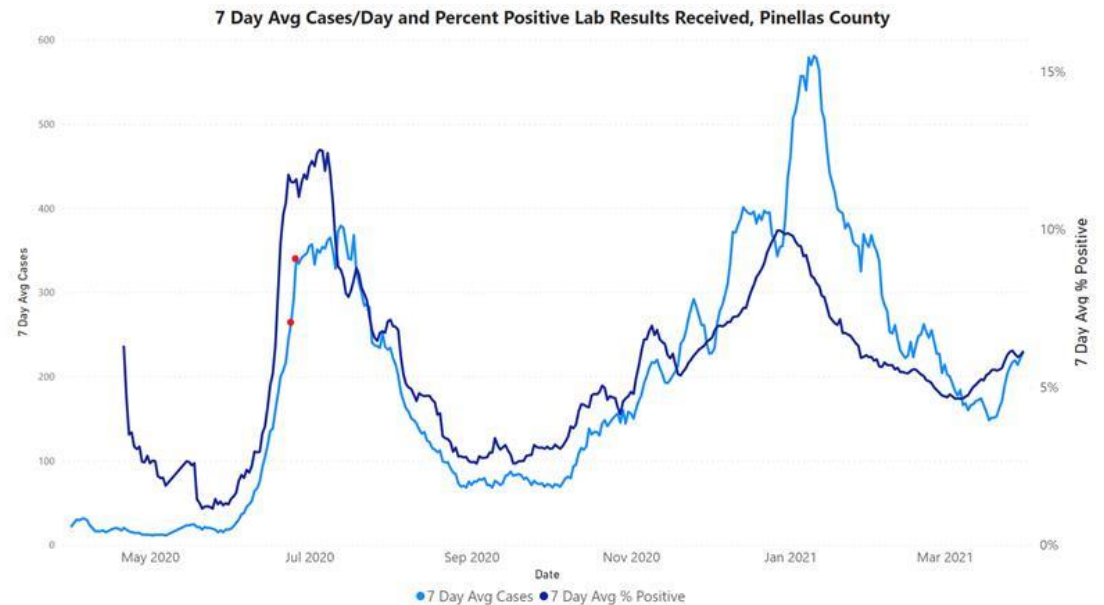
- On June 22, 2020, the State Surgeon General/State Health Officer issued a Public Health Advisory which advised all persons in Florida, with certain enumerated exceptions, to wear a face covering in any setting where social distancing is not possible. Current guidelines still encourage people to wear a face mask in public.
- On June 23, 2020 the County Commissioners of Pinellas County adopted a [face covering ordinance](#) (20-14) requiring individuals to wear a face covering in publicly-accessible places. This measure is still in effect.
- The chart below, illustrated by a red dot, shows that on June 24th Pinellas County face covering ordinance (20-14) went into effect, and the trend in the number of 7-day moving average number of cases and percent positive lab results for Pinellas County thereafter. The second red dot on June 26th indicates the State Emergency Order 2020-09 closing on premise consumption of alcoholic beverages at businesses that earn more than 50% of revenue from alcohol sales. This measure has been suspended.

Wear a face mask in public

Cover your mouth and nose with a [face mask](#) when around others and out in public, such as the grocery store.

Don't place a face mask cover on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or any who is unable to remove the face mask without assistance.

Why? You could spread COVID-19 to others even if you do not feel sick. The face mask is meant to protect other people in case you are infected.



IV. FLORIDA: COUNTIES STATEWIDE

Eighteen counties in Florida still have a countywide face covering requirement. These counties for the most part are urban with a denser population.

Table A list a subset of counties used for this report. The counties listed in red are counties without a countywide mask ordinance.

Table B and chart B1 below illustrate a subset of the eighteen counties. Current 7-day average case count across these counties are still higher than what was seen during the beginning of the pandemic (April-May).

Table A	Population	Mask Ordinance - Date
Broward	1,951,260	22-May
Duval	950,181	29-Jun
Hillsborough	1,436,890	22-Jun
Orange	1,380,640	18-Jun
Palm Beach	1,485,940	24-Jun
Pinellas	975,280	23-Jun
Clay	219,252	N/A
Lee	770,577	N/A
Manatee	394,855	optional as of 09/29/20
Pasco	539,630	Optional as of 04/05/21
Polk	724,777	N/A
Sarasota	433,742	N/A

Table B: 7-day rolling average of cases (Source: Florida Department of Health)

7 Day Rolling Average Cases											
April and May 2020			June and July 2020			Dec 2020 and Jan 2021			March 2021		
County	Population	7 Day Avg Cases	County	Population	7 Day Avg Cases	County	Population	7 Day Avg Cases	County	Population	7 Day Avg Cases
Broward	1,951,260	98.02	Broward	1,951,260	743.66	Broward	1,951,260	1028.68	Broward	1,951,260	635.55
Duval	950,181	21.77	Duval	950,181	309.02	Duval	950,181	591.94	Duval	950,181	126.03
Hillsborough	1,436,890	29.55	Hillsborough	1,436,890	428.82	Hillsborough	1,436,890	666.11	Hillsborough	1,436,890	327.13
Orange	1,380,640	25.62	Orange	1,380,640	404.25	Orange	1,380,640	740.37	Orange	1,380,640	296.81
Palm Beach	1,485,940	86.65	Palm Beach	1,485,940	427.92	Palm Beach	1,485,940	646.95	Palm Beach	1,485,940	355.74
Pinellas	975,280	18.16	Pinellas	975,280	236.34	Pinellas	975,280	403.58	Pinellas	975,280	182.35
Clay	219,252	6.51	Clay	219,252	37.98	Clay	219,252	117.13	Clay	219,252	21.71
Lee	770,577	27.28	Lee	770,577	210.70	Lee	770,577	345.11	Lee	770,577	153.06
Manatee	384,855	16.15	Manatee	384,855	117.16	Manatee	384,855	181.27	Manatee	384,855	91.52
Pasco	539,630	5.68	Pasco	539,630	93.43	Pasco	539,630	232.68	Pasco	539,630	98.84
Polk	724,777	15.03	Polk	724,777	183.11	Polk	724,777	355.68	Polk	724,777	134.45
Sarasota	433,742	9.05	Sarasota	433,742	75.64	Sarasota	433,742	163.85	Sarasota	433,742	69.23

Chart B1: 7-day rolling average of cases

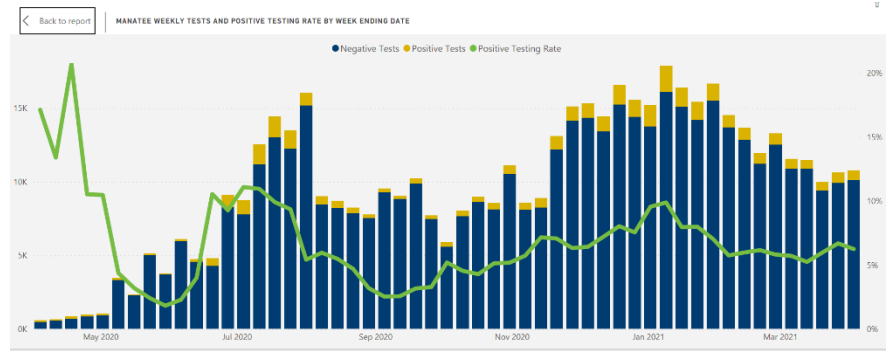
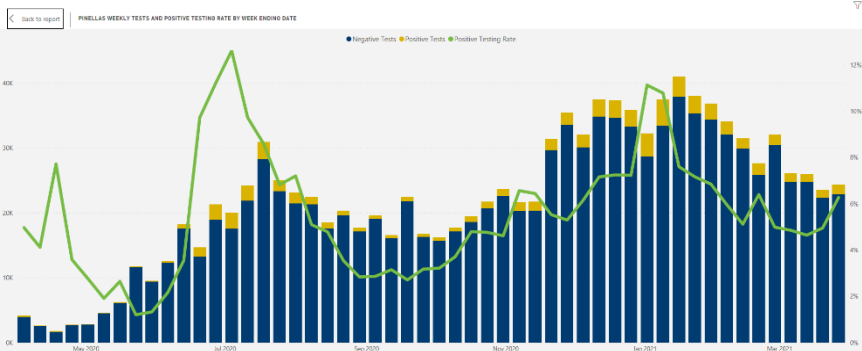
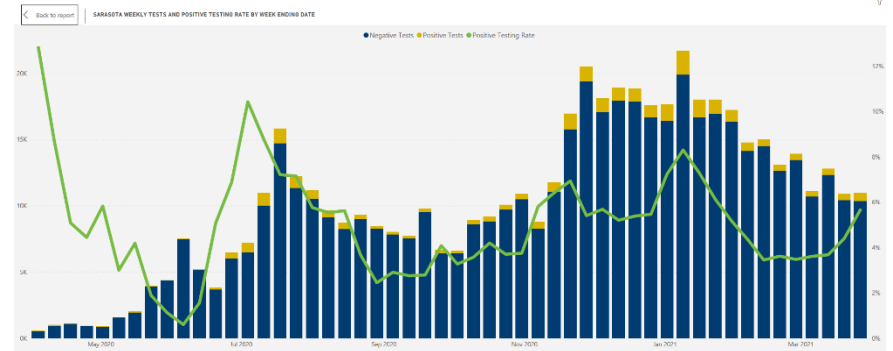
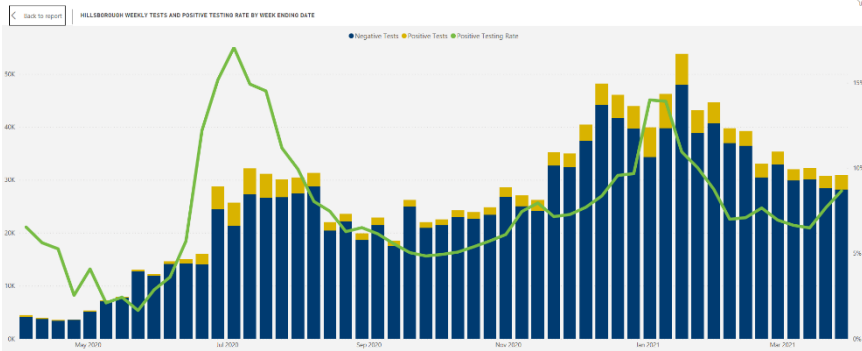
These charts illustrate the 7-day rolling average of cases for the counties from Table B above. Last six charts highlighted with a darker gray are counties without a countywide mask ordinance. *Source: Florida Department of Health*



Tampa Bay Area – Weekly and Positive Testing Rate by Week

Countywide Mask Ordinance (Hillsborough, Pinellas)

No Countywide Mask Ordinance (Sarasota and Manatee)



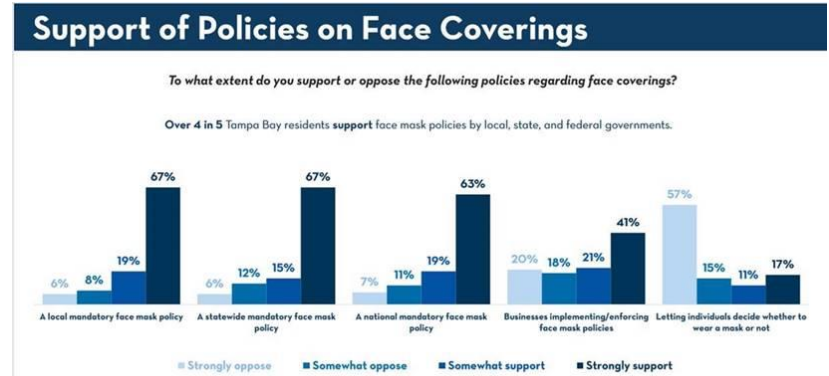
These charts were produced by the Tampa Bay Partnership and available on their dashboard

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjojZTViNDcxNjgtNmFhYy00NDZhLWl4YTQzMzZmVjNzJiN2ZyZlwiZCI6ImYzNjMwNjE4LTZlZmYyLmFtNGMyNC1hOGU5LWVjZDdhZWVjZmFhYyIsImMiOjJ9>

IV. SURVEY RESULTS – REFLECTING SENTIMENT ABOUT MASKS

A survey completed in the second quarter of 2020 by the Tampa Bay Partnership with residents of Hillsborough, Pinellas, Pasco, and Hernando Counties reflected a high rate of support for policies mandating face coverings.

A more recent survey completed by the Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonprofit organization filling the need for trusted, independent information on national health issues, indicate that 70% of adults said they could continue adhering to social distancing guidelines for six months or more, or until vaccine is widely available. https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/report/kff-health-tracking-poll-december-2020/?utm_campaign=KFF-2020-polling-surveys&utm_medium=email&_hsmt=2&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-WfEOsYzhASwMAIMMQiV868JxUIIUKInUVO3jAMbGQrw_2nXMYqB67RjzsblyrJ8YeqMpTDNRKUErvzrCcQH0yVShA&utm_content=2&utm_source=hs_email



And according to a survey completed by Destination Analysts, a market research company, 76.1% of respondents agree that people should wear face masks when they are in public, down from 80.6% in July.

OPINIONS ON WEARING FACE MASKS

