

As you may or may not know, on June 17, the Governor gave authority to local governments to adopt policies regarding the wearing of face coverings in public “based on conditions in its jurisdiction.” His order gave cities and towns the power to act on their own, which is important as not all statewide mandates fit our city. Arizona has a wide variety of communities and we applaud Governor Ducey for allowing municipalities to set guidelines that best serve our individual cities and towns. What is best for Phoenix and other metro areas is not necessarily the best for smaller, rural communities.

Since that time, I have been asked about invoking a mask mandate. First and foremost, I want to continue to express my desire for people to wear masks when they cannot remain 6’ from others, to continue frequent handwashing and frequently using hand sanitizer and following all CDC guidelines. I would also like to inform you that individual stores and businesses may put in place their own policies. I would ask that you respect them when entering their facility.

I want you to know that since information on COVID19 cases has been available on the State Department of Health’s website and the County’s Health Department website, I, along with the City Manager, have examined and will continue to examine the numbers of cases in Cochise County. This number on both of these sites provided the total number of cases to date. On Tuesday, June 23, it was very exciting to be notified that the County’s website would start including the total number of ACTIVE cases in each zip code area. This is very important as we examine the numbers and utilize this information to make the best decisions for our city.

At this time, (as of July 27, 2020) there are 12 active cases in the 85602-zip code. While many times, we speak about the incorporated city limits, it is important to note the 85602 zip code includes not only the city limits of Benson, but also includes Mescal, J-6, Willow Lakes, Cascabel, and Pomerene (with the exception of PO Box addresses) and the surrounding areas, going down Highway 80 and down Highway 90 past Kartchner Caverns, and has a population of about 10,000 people.

Some cities in Cochise County have enacted mask requirements, I would like to note that all those policies provide exemptions for health issues that prevent individuals from safely wearing masks. That would include young children, those with breathing difficulties (asthma, emphysema, COPD, etc.) and those with emotional/mental conditions that would be exacerbated by being constricted in a mask. Because of these exceptions, those that fall into those categories cannot be forced to “mask up”. This is backed up by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and every city that did these proclamations added wording protecting those who cannot wear a mask.

There is also the question of enforcement; as you may know, the County Sheriff’s office issued a letter in opposition of the County’s proposed proclamation requiring masks in Cochise County. One of the reasons cited in his letter is “the unrealistic enforcement application.” With the exemptions, (which require no medical certification), enforcement would, indeed, be difficult.

In the County Board of Supervisors discussion, it was said that if the mandate was “not enforceable by responsible authorities”, they set themselves up for “citizen enforcement” with citizens challenging citizens in parking lots, stores and the situations can be volatile.

The Board of Supervisors' Chair then said that people need to take personal responsibility to keep themselves safe.

While I whole-heartedly agree, I will continue to monitor the spread of COVID19 in our area and encourage everyone to stay vigilant and continue to follow the CDC guidelines. At this time, I will not implement a mandate requiring masks.

The CDC guidelines are (at this time):

- Wash hands often, if soap or water is not readily available, use hand sanitizer.
- Avoid close contact, physically distance yourself at least 6 feet.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a face covering or mask when around others.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Monitor your health and stay at home when sick.

Let's do the right thing to safeguard and maximize health in our community. As always, I ask that you Stay Calm, Stay Kind and Stay Safe.

Thank you.

Mayor Toney D. King, Sr.