August 23, 2021

Dear Director Walensky and Administrator Pekoske:

We, the undersigned organizations representing clinicians, public health, scientists and patients, thank you for maintaining the requirement that all individuals wear masks on public transportation and encourage you to keep this policy in place until low transmission rates in addition to increased vaccination rates make it safe to lift. We greatly appreciate the August 17, 2021 announcement that the mask requirement has been extended through January 18, 2022.

Compelling evidence\(^1\) has demonstrated that mask wearing is effective at preventing transmission of COVID-19. Diverse populations co-mingle on public transportation, including children too young to be vaccinated, older adults and individuals who are immunocompromised. In addition, communities of color, who have been hardest hit by the pandemic, are more likely to live in densely populated metro areas and depend on public transportation to go to work, seek healthcare and buy groceries, increasing the risk of exposure to the virus\(^2\). People are often in close proximity and unable to practice physical distancing for prolonged periods in public transportation settings. Universal mask wearing in these settings is an important strategy to stop the spread of infections and allow people to continue traveling safely.

High or substantial transmission rates in most of the country coupled with the significantly increased transmissibility of the Delta variant greatly increase individuals’ risk of exposure to COVID-19. During this high-risk time, a combination of multiple prevention strategies (vaccination, mask wearing, physical distancing, hand hygiene, etc.) is critical to prevent infections, hospitalizations and deaths. Requiring masks on public transportation will continue to be an important component of this strategy.

Thank you for your commitment to leading with science and for your tireless work to overcome this pandemic, including by increasing vaccination rates and mask wearing.

Sincerely,

AIDS Action Baltimore
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
American Academy of Family Physicians

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\(^1\) [https://www.pnas.org/content/118/4/e2014564118](https://www.pnas.org/content/118/4/e2014564118)

\(^2\) [Who relies on public transit in the U.S. | Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org)
Council of Medical Specialty Societies
Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
Endocrine Society
HIV Medicine Association
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security
Labor of Love Safety Training and Consulting
National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors
National Network of Public Health Institutes
North Carolina AIDS Action Network
Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Society for Vascular Surgery
Society of Hospital Medicine
Society of Interventional Radiology
The Gerontological Society of America
Thrive at Life: Working Solutions
Treatment Action Group
Trust for America’s Health