



February 10, 2021

Dear Governor Reynolds,

On Friday, February 5th, 2021, public health officials from across the state learned that you had eliminated key COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures from your [Proclamation of Disaster Emergency](#). Like you, public health practitioners are eager to alleviate the health, social, and economic strain placed on Iowa communities and businesses by the pandemic. However, we would be remiss in our responsibility as protectors of public health if we did not let you know that your decision to lift mask requirements and gathering limits is actively detrimental to our pursuit to end the pandemic. We believe this decision was not rooted in evidence or expert opinion and did not come as a recommendation from your own public health agency.

The downward trend in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths is cause for *cautious* optimism – the spread of variant strains coupled with limited supply of vaccine underscore that now is not the time to abandon masks, social distancing, or limits on gatherings. It is because of these measures that Iowa has seen improved positivity rates, but it should not be construed that the spread is no longer considerable, or the risk of severe illness is diminished. We are concerned the trend will reverse if mitigation strategies are abandoned.

Our state and local public health partners have been working tirelessly for a year to limit the devastating effects of COVID-19. Beginning with the first prevention messages and community education, through testing and contact tracing, and now with the administration of vaccines - we are now starting to see the finish line within reach. Iowa will return to “normal,” but not without doing the hard work of protecting ourselves and our fellow Iowans. This is the time to remain steady in our mitigation strategy.

The mandate that was in place until last Sunday reinforced the correct message that masks and social distancing are critical in reducing the spread of COVID. The new message from you is that it is no longer necessary to be conscientious in protecting ourselves and our communities. This is wrong, and for many, will be dead wrong. ***Without a universal mask mandate, modeling projects a 30-fold difference in new daily cases of coronavirus and more than 400 avoidable deaths of Iowans by Memorial Day weekend.*** We want Iowa to lead the nation in the charge to stop the spread of the virus and get through these difficult days of health insecurity, social disruption, and economic uncertainty. Instead, we became a trending hashtag.

Governor Reynolds, your continued plea for Iowans to do the right thing is correct. The right thing to stop this pandemic is for Iowans to wear a mask, practice social distancing, limit social gatherings, stay home if ill, quarantine if exposed, and get vaccinated when it's our turn. If we expect Iowans to do the right thing, we need that reinforced by our leaders in word and action.

We all want to celebrate the end of the pandemic as soon as possible. But we are not there yet. Lifting the mask, social distancing, and gathering restrictions may obstruct our road to a healthy Iowa and robust economic and social recovery. Please help us help Iowans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Whitaker'.

Jeremy Whitaker, EdD, MPH
IPHA Board President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lina Tucker Reinders'.

Lina Tucker Reinders, MPH
IPHA Executive Director

Leader[s] in Health Equity