

Dear Montgomery County Councilmembers,

In light of the latest mask mandate extension before the council, I write you once again as a concerned Bethesda resident, and scientific professional in the biotech industry with expertise in Infectious Disease (Ph.D. Microbiology and Immunology, University of Maryland, Baltimore, 2015) to oppose the continuation of a mask mandate in Montgomery County.

Throughout this pandemic, there has been substantial confusion regarding the effectiveness of different public health mitigation measures in preventing the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Travel from specific countries has been selectively restricted, despite [clear evidence](#) that this has no effect COVID-19 incidence (1). Temperature checks are still implemented to enter some businesses and institutions despite compelling [data](#) showing screening for fever lacks sensitivity to detect infection (2). Some locations still emphasise incessant cleaning of surfaces despite [evidence](#) that this is not the main transmission route of SARS-CoV-2 (3).

Mask wearing is still regarded by many as an effective public health intervention to reduce the spread of infection, but even highly touted studies in this area are plagued with limitations in study design and results, including the reliance on self reporting, lack of control groups, wide confidence intervals, reliance on non-randomized observational data, among [other issues](#) (4,5).

To be clear - N95 respirators (when [properly fitted](#)) are highly effective at blocking virus particles (6). However, in light of the highly transmissible Omicron variant, it is now widely [acknowledged](#) by most public health officials and scientists that commonly used cloth masks and surgical masks offer very limited protection against this variant, recommending instead KN95, KF94 or N95s (7).

However, since N95 respirators require a proper fit to be effective, it is not at all appropriate to wield a broad policy hammer and mandate masks for everyone when it is impossible to police the type of mask and proper fit. Under the current mandate, a thin single layer cloth mask is sufficient for anyone to enter a crowded business in Montgomery County, which calls into serious question the effectiveness of this type of mandate. Indeed, anyone who wishes can simply wear a [fake mask](#) just to be compliant with local regulations (8). We must avoid policy that is more about virtue signalling and appearing to 'do something' when it is not at all science or evidence-based, as this seriously damages the credibility of all public health guidance.

SARS-CoV-2 is here to stay, every single human on this planet will get infected, and it will be endemic for generations to come. However, there is fantastic news - recent [data](#) from the CDC looking at over 1.2 million vaccinated people for over 10 months shows a miniscule chance of death after just two doses of vaccine (0.0013%). When it comes to the metric that matters, the vaccines perform spectacularly (9).

In a free society, people must be able to undergo their own risk assessments when out in public. With vaccines highly effective at reducing severe illness now widely available, a highly vaccinated population of over 85% in MoCo, and [increasing data](#) (10) showing that Omicron itself causes less severe illness, it is long past time to dispense with all unnecessary COVID theatre.

Please vote to remove this mask mandate from Montgomery County.

Regards,
Sergio A. Mojica, Ph.D.

References

- 1.) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33690835/>
- 2.) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32578926/>

- 3.) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/science-and-research/surface-transmission.html>
- 4.) <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2021/10/commentary-what-can-masks-do-part-1-science-behind-covid-19-protection>
- 5.) <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/2021-11/working-paper-64.pdf>
- 6.) <https://aip.scitation.org/doi/10.1063/5.0057100>
- 7.) <https://www.newsweek.com/some-doctors-urging-retire-cloth-push-hospital-grade-masks-amid-omicron-surge-1663495>
- 8.) <https://fakemaskworldwide.com/>
- 9.) https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7101a4.htm?fbclid=IwAR1DLLyDvoiwBylyREonX_QhophT9Ct-GUIzdHE5vbAaXjz3mm1H_q4kewA
- 10.) <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2022.01.11.22269045v1.full.pdf>