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## Maine Physicians: Masks & Vaccinations More Important Than Ever

Largest Physician Organization in Maine Says Both Remain Critical Prevention Measures

**Manchester, ME, December 22, 2021** – With COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in Maine continuing to grow at an alarming rate, the over 4,000 physician members of the [Maine Medical Association](#) are strongly urging vaccinations, boosters, and for all Mainers to mask while indoors or in crowded outdoor settings with people outside of their household, regardless of vaccination status.

In addition, the organization is calling on businesses statewide to again require masking of all employees and the public and post clear signage that masks are required for customers and visitors, and to provide masks for those without them.

Masks and vaccines are a critical tool in the fight against COVID-19 and its variants – particularly in a community setting. Combined with hand-washing and physical distancing, these tools are the best way to stay healthy and reduce the risk of hospitalization, severe illness, and death.

MMA President, Jeff Barkin, MD is hopeful that Mainers will do what it takes to help everyone. “We can all do something important to fight COVID-19. As a psychiatrist, I know how seriously your lives have changed and how much you miss your loved ones but there’s a real and dangerous risk we could lose all progress. Please, do the right thing. Get vaccinated. Get your booster. And wear a mask.” said Barkin.

Current case surges and the yet unknown severity of the extremely contagious Omicron variant has raised fears of a dangerous post-holiday spike due to holiday gatherings of family and friends, making it imperative that everyone proactively take strict precautions to avoid potentially spreading COVID-19 to others who may become seriously ill. Now more than ever we need to protect our communities and help our hospitals.

Lani Graham, M.D., MPH, longtime MMA member and former director of the Maine Bureau of Health, later renamed as the Maine CDC stressed, “Masking and vaccines are proven public health measures to reducing COVID-19 transmission.” She continued, “States and communities requiring masks not only had lower cases but more importantly, fewer people in the hospital and lower death rates. Even with Maine’s high vaccination and booster rates, wearing a mask is as important.”

Dr. Graham points to the work researchers at the University of Pittsburgh School and Carnegie Mellon University have done on the impact of mask mandates at the state level since the beginning of the pandemic. [In a new study](#), using data from Delta’s summer spread, newer universal indoor mask mandates in 5 states —regardless of vaccination status — reduced COVID-19 case counts in the weeks after their implementation compared to states without mask mandates—even when comparing states with higher rates of fully vaccinated residents.

Dr. Barkin added, "It is clear that the vast majority of transmission occurs in private gatherings and the science continues to show that mask wearing can quickly and dramatically slow infection rates—for vaccinated and unvaccinated alike."

### **About the Maine Medical Association.**

The [Maine Medical Association](#) is the state's largest physician organization representing over 4,300 physicians, medical students, and residents across all specialties in all Maine medical settings. The MMA is led by a [volunteer board of directors](#) and was formed with a clear focus on patients and promoting public health in 1853. It is one of fifty state medical societies that make up the [federation of medicine](#) along with the [American Medical Association](#).

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