



April 12, 2021

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Governor of North Dakota
600 E. Boulevard
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Governor Burgum,

As organizations representing physicians, long-term care providers and hospitals, we, the undersigned, sincerely thank you for your leadership throughout the pandemic. As North Dakota's infection rates climbed and deaths increased, you recognized that local control efforts were not enough and took charge by implementing stronger controls to stop the spread. We applaud you for placing health needs and saving lives before politics.

We, the undersigned, oppose HB 1323, as it eliminates authority for the governor and state health officer when North Dakota needs it most – during a pandemic.

Your leadership of implementing a state-wide mask mandate significantly reduced COVID-19 infections throughout North Dakota. Statistics show North Dakota went from a high of 11,301 current infections on November 14 to 4,758 infections on December 7 – a 58 percent reduction. During this same period, North Dakota's 14 day rolling average of positivity went from 15.70 percent on November 14 to 9.79 percent on December 6.

Your actions saved lives. North Dakota's infection rates were the highest in the country. People were dying. The most vulnerable – the elderly and long-term care residents – became the highest COVID-19 war casualties. Although this group represented only 10 percent of infections, statistics show this group resulted in 60 percent of deaths. We lost mothers, fathers, grandparents and loved ones way too soon, leaving survivors to deal with war-torn scars.

As we learned from experience, voluntary mask requests and localized mandates are not effective. The HB 1323 amendment, which allows businesses, institutions, and local governments to mandate a mask requirement, has been proven to not be effective through this pandemic.

The statistics have been researched. If North Dakota passes a ban on a mask mandate, we will be the only state in the nation to have this restrictive measure.


HB 1323 puts politics before health. Therefore, we, the undersigned, ask you to VETO the passage of this bill to safeguard public health protections. The governor and state health officer

should have the authority to safeguard public health. Without this authority lives are at risk, if not in the pandemic we are still fighting, but future pandemics.


Thank you for your consideration of this request.



Courtney Koebele
Executive Director
ND Medical Association



Shelly Peterson
President
ND Long Term Care Association



Tim Blasl
President
ND Hospital Association

ATTACHMENT

<https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/21546014/mask-mandates-coronavirus-covid-19>

Why every state should adopt a mask mandate

By Lois Parshley and Youyou Zhou Updated Dec 4, 2020, 4:00pm EST

Deborah Birx, the coordinator of the White House coronavirus task force, toured North Dakota this fall, as the state was overwhelmed by one of the worst Covid-19 outbreaks in the country. While she commended the state's testing efforts, she was distraught by the noticeable lack of face masks in public spaces. "This is the least use of masks that we have seen in retail establishments of any place we have been," she said at an October 26 press conference.

North Dakota, which at the time didn't require masks, had the lowest mask-wearing rate in the country in October, according to survey data.

North Dakota is not the only state that lagged in a mask policy in the throes of a major outbreak, however: Eight of the top 10 states that saw the highest new cases per capita in October did not have a widespread mask mandate, as the chart below shows. (Several of these Great Plains and Midwestern states were spared significant outbreaks of the virus until the fall.)

Several states without mask mandates saw big increases of Covid-19 cases in October

■ No mandate ■ With a mandate

