

PHONE: (410) 819-5600
TOLL FREE: 1-877-810-7184



FAX: (410) 819-5690
TTY: 1-800-735-2258 MD RELAY

100 S. HANSON STREET, EASTON, MD 21601
Fredia S. Wadley, MD, Health Officer

HEALTH OFFICER'S UPDATE – November 13, 2020

Across Maryland COVID-19 cases are steadily increasing as they are across the United States. The COVID-19 cases being hospitalized has dramatically increased in Maryland over the last week. Contributing to these higher numbers are increased indoor dining, indoor use of fitness centers, plus family and social gatherings. This is true not only in Maryland but across the US. The common thread to these higher risk scenarios is being indoors with a group of people without masks for the entire time.

The Governor's Executive Order states that all persons over five years of age are wear facial coverings while in public places. That is sound advice. But people are always looking for loopholes for avoiding a mask. The exception to the mask requirement is when an individual cannot safely exercise with a mask. Since this wording is open to interpretation about what is safe and what is just a little discomfort, then many people made the decision not to wear a mask. But this action increases the risk for themselves and others. When we are exercising, we exhale more forcefully and this increases the amount of virus breathed into the air. This is true for someone that is infected, even if they have no symptoms. It would be far safer for those using the fitness centers to wear a mask the entire time and even while exercising. Those that find this uncomfortable should exercise outdoors or at home. The same can be said for indoor sports. Just because it is more difficult to exercise vigorously with a mask, doesn't make it safe to exercise without a mask.

Now this will push many to say that their rights are being violated if they have to wear a mask while exercising. Well, how about the individuals willing to exercise with a mask but not willing to take the risk of using their fitness center if others aren't wearing masks. These people have paid their fitness center dues and can't use the center because not all will follow the guidelines of wearing masks. Whose rights are being violated depends upon the perspective.

The ugly truth is that it is next to impossible to change human behavior with laws or mandates over a short period of time. Even when laws have mandated no smoking in public places, wearing helmets while on a motorcycle, and use of seat belts, it took several years to really change the culture and get people to adhere to the laws. With a pandemic we don't have years to convince people to wear masks and practice social distancing to slow the spread of the virus. And the simple face covering has been so politicized that some feel they are being disloyal to their political beliefs if they wear a mask. I understand the emotion that might be attached to wearing masks, but the virus only cares about jumping from one individual to another to survive, and we make that easier for the virus when we don't wear facial coverings indoors in public places.

Our Governor is trying hard to avoid restrictions on businesses and individuals, but still warns the public of the risks they are taking when they don't wear masks and practice social distancing. Just because it is not illegal to expose others to COVID-19 virus, doesn't mean it is right to put people at unnecessary risk.