



Written by [James Murphy](#) on July 8, 2020

## White House Chief of Staff Says No Federal Mask Mandate Is Coming

White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows told *Fox and Friends* on Monday that a national mandate to wear masks “is not in order” as some states report a surge in diagnosed cases of the COVID-19 virus.

Amid a reported surge in cases of the novel coronavirus, many governors and mayors have issued mask mandates at the state and local levels, with some corporate entities, such as Costco, also requiring that customers wear face coverings while on their premises.



But according to Meadows, no national order on the wearing of masks is forthcoming.

“Well, it’s certainly a state-to-state issue, as we look across the country, obviously the narrative is the COVID cases are rising, but the testing is rising exponentially. We’ve now tested almost ten percent of our country,” Meadows said.

“And yet when we look at masks and the wearing of masks, that’s done on a location basis, when you can’t have social distancing, but certainly a national mandate is not in order,” Meadows said. “We’re allowing governors and mayors to weigh in on that.”

“Allowing”? Meadows could have chosen a better word, since “allowing governors and mayors to weigh in” suggests, wrongly, that the federal government possesses the constitutional authority to impose a national mask mandate.

Many governors and mayors have weighed in. At least 18 states and countless municipalities have mandated the wearing of masks in their jurisdictions to some degree. Most of these mandates involve the wearing of masks indoors and places where social distancing is not practical such as taxi-cabs, ride-sharing services and public transit.

The fines for not wearing a mask can be steep depending on the state or municipality. In [Hawaii](#), for instance, violations of the mask mandate could face fines of up to \$5,000 and up to a year in jail.

Republican Greg Abbott of Texas became the latest governor to issue such an edict when he signed an executive order last Thursday that requires citizens to wear face coverings in commercial settings, public buildings, and outdoor settings where social distancing is not possible in counties where 20 or more cases of COVID-19 have been reported.

The Trump administration has been consistently saying that the federal government will defer to states on the issue of mask-wearing. The president himself has typically eschewed wearing masks and has left the decision about whether his staff should wear them up to the individual. For the campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, last month, Press Secretary referred to mask-wearing as a “personal choice.”

And last week, Vice President Mike Pence again stressed that such mandates are up to the individual



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states not the federal government.

“We believe that Americans should wear a mask whenever state and local authorities indicate that it’s appropriate, or whenever social distancing is not possible. And we’ll continue to convey that message,” Pence said last week.

The Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) guidelines are fairly straightforward: “Everyone should wear a cloth face cover when they have to go out in public. The CDC also “recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.”

The Trump campaign plans a rally in Portsmouth, New Hampshire on Saturday and attendees are “strongly encouraged” to wear a mask to the event, which the campaign will provide along with hand sanitizer. Meadows referred to this as a precautionary measure.

“Obviously we’re looking forward to being in the Granite State and back with the folks up in New Hampshire, and as we look at that it’s more a factor of precaution,” Meadows said.

Wearing a mask is not a panacea when it comes to disease prevention – and mask-wearing does not always mean a positive outcome for the person wearing it. Prolonged use of facial coverings can cause skin irritation, acne outbreaks and even panic attacks for some. Simply mandating their use under penalties of fines or jail time is short-sighted and, in some cases, potentially dangerous. (See *The New American* article “[Should I Wear a Face Mask?](#)” for information about the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of face masks for preventing COVID-19.)

The CDC can recommend all they want about the issue of masks. In the end, it should always be a personal choice as to whether to wear one or not. All any government should really do is to inform its citizens of the possible benefits and risks of wearing a mask or not – which they have done ad nauseam – and allow us to make the decision for ourselves.

*Photo: evgenyatamanenko/iStock/Getty Images Plus*

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