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**Thursday, July 1, 2021**

This weekend, we celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Together, we celebrate the importance of freedom for all Americans - a celebration made more sweet in the wake of the COVID19 pandemic.

But as we gather, new threats to that hard-won freedom emerge. The highly contagious delta variant has been identified in over 85 countries, and currently accounts for at least 20% of new infections in the United States. In response, officials in Los Angeles, Israel, other global hubs, and the WHO now urge everyone, including fully vaccinated individuals, to recommit to wearing masks indoors. Their rationale: these small actions can help protect the societal freedoms that have only recently returned.

In Illinois, a global hub in our own right, the importance of controlling the spread of COVID-19 variants cannot be understated. While the risk to vaccinated individuals remains low, those who cannot get vaccinated (children) or are unable to mount an immune response (immunocompromised, elderly) are now left at the mercy of those unvaccinated to reliably and consistently mask. The recent outbreaks in Illinois as well as recent polls highlight the confusion and complacency about the need to mask if you are unvaccinated. As a result, the Illinois Medical Professionals Action Collaborative (IMPACT) strongly encourages everyone, regardless of vaccination status, to wear masks when in public indoor spaces, in essence modeling the behavior we need to protect those most vulnerable. In addition, we encourage all those who are unvaccinated to get vaccinated to protect themselves as soon as possible.

Wearing a mask indoors in public is an easy, effective way to prevent more cases, and avoid more mitigation measures as we encourage more people to get vaccinated. It is the way to enjoy the freedoms that we have worked so hard to attain over the last 15 months. As physicians, as parents, as members of your communities, and as Americans, we ask everyone to commit to protect one another - and to protect our freedom.

Sincerely,

**The Illinois Medical Professionals Action Collaborative Team (IMPACT)**