



Urgent Call to Action: City Officials COVID-19 Talking Points January 5, 2021

Now more than ever, it is critical that Georgia city officials play an active role in conveying the urgency of this crisis to their residents and using every means possible to urge them to follow the advice of medical experts – wear masks, maintain social distance, wash their hands, avoid large gatherings and avoid being in crowded, poorly ventilated, closed settings. It is also imperative that cities urge residents and businesses to comply with the Governor's executive order, as well as exercise the authority which has been granted to enforce it.

Public health officials across the state and country have consistently and repeatedly informed us of the importance of wearing masks to prevent the spread of COVID. The Governor's Executive Orders, for months, have allowed local governments whose case rates were in the red zone (100 or more new cases per 100,000 population), meaning cases were spiraling out of control in those local jurisdictions, to impose mask mandates if the local governing authority chose to do so. As a result, GMA developed a [model mask ordinance](#), which complies with the Governor's Executive Orders and leaves the decision to impose a mask requirement to the local governing authority.

Polls consistently show that the public trusts their local officials more than leaders at any other level of government. If ever there was a time for city leaders to use this influence, it is now! Please find below a list of talking points that we are asking Georgia leaders to share with their communities.

COVID-19 Talking Points

- The [COVID-19 crisis in Georgia](#) is worsening and fast approaching a catastrophic level. [Cases and hospitalizations](#) are increasing beyond available resources, and with the positive tests continuing to climb, many [hospitals](#) across the state have little to no [ICU](#) bed capacity.
- Primarily as a result of large group and small home gatherings during the holiday season, caseloads are predicted to increase significantly in the coming days. Hospitals will be overflowing and in many regions a shortage of nurses and other medical personnel is projected.
- [Vaccines](#) against COVID-19 are starting to be available and although their availability at this point is limited, over the next few months they should become more readily available. It is imperative that elected officials support and encourage vaccination as a way to help limit the spread of COVID-19.

LEGAL REMINDERS: Gov. Brian Kemp's Executive Order:

- It is a violation of the Governor's Executive Order and a misdemeanor crime for people to gather in groups of more than 50 persons if they are required to stand or be seated within six feet of any other person.
 - Unfortunately, there has been little to no enforcement of this provision, which has been one major factor in the increased spread of the virus in Georgia. ***The Governor has clearly set the framework that this is a violation and municipalities must do their part to start enforcing this restriction to help reduce the spread.***
- It is a violation of the Governor's Executive Order and a misdemeanor crime for bars to allow more than 50 persons on the premises or to exceed 35% of the fire capacity, whichever is greater, but there has also been little to no enforcement of this measure as well.
 - ***The Governor has clearly set the framework that this is a violation and municipalities must do their part to start enforcing this restriction to help reduce the spread.*** (With major sporting events taking place, failure to enforce regulations will increase spread in the community.)
- It is a violation of the Governor's Executive Order and a misdemeanor crime for restaurants to have seating arrangements that do not ensure at least six feet of separation from seating to seating or utilize physical barriers to separate groups sitting within six feet of one another. There has been little to no enforcement of this measure.
 - ***The Governor has clearly set the framework that this is a violation and municipalities should help do their part to start enforcing this restriction to help reduce the spread.*** (With major sporting events taking place, failure to enforce regulations will increase spread in the community.)



Tips for Sharing This Life-Saving Message:

Communications Goal: Explain to your constituents how critically important it is for everyone to act responsibly and do their part to curb the spread of the deadly coronavirus. It is our civic duty, and lives and livelihoods depend on it.

- Host an emergency press conference (consider coordinating with your regional public health directors and hospital administrators)
- Release an op-ed to your local media
- Post urgent calls to action on social media
- Send a special citywide newsletter (or from each councilmember)
- Share the hospital, ICU, and available resource capacity in your area with citizens of your city

Additional Talking Points:

- Cases may continue to rise, but ICU and hospital capacities cannot rise exponentially with them. If the situation continues to worsen, it may become harder and harder for hospitals to provide care to every patient that needs it. You do not want to put yourself and others in the position where you or they may not be able to get the care you or they need.
- The vaccine is here, and it is being administered to more Georgians every day. Regardless of your spot in line, if you take precautions now, you may avoid contracting COVID, and you won't have to worry about the many known long-term impacts on your health.
- The very same people you want to gather with are likely the people you most want to protect. Avoiding indoor gatherings now means you can keep each other safe, healthy and alive for gatherings in the future once you are vaccinated, community spread has significantly declined, and herd immunity has been achieved.
- Many medical professionals expected Georgia's case rates to climb substantially following the Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza, and New Years' holidays as they similarly climbed after Thanksgiving. Recent data shows that our current case rate per 100,000 residents in Georgia is the highest it has been since the start of the pandemic and at least 60% higher than our summer surge.
- Bars/Restaurants: Georgia has allowed struggling bars and restaurants to remain open so that more small local businesses are not lost. Failing to follow the governor's guidelines puts your favorite small businesses at risk and may make it even harder for them to keep their doors open. Encourage people to utilize takeout (including new takeout alcohol options in cities that have made it available) and delivery (including new alcohol delivery options where available). Alcohol options can also be tied to sports events.