

**ALACHUA COUNTY
SECOND EXTENSION OF THE SHORT TERM EMERGENCY
ORDER 2021-25**

WHEREAS, on February 24th 2021 President Biden extended, for another year, the national state of emergency due to COVID-19 contained in Proclamation 9994 by President Trump; and

WHEREAS, both President Biden and Governor Ron DeSantis have recommended that all individuals who are able to be vaccinated get vaccinated, and both have stated that the SARS-CoV-2 (“COVID-19”) vaccine saves lives; and

WHEREAS, the CDC has designated Alachua County being in the high community transmission category, meaning 100 or more cases for every 100,000 people and/or lab test positivity rate for COVID-19 that is 10% or higher; and

WHEREAS, because of the increased incidence of infection being caused by the Delta variant of COVID-19, the CDC now recommends that face masks be worn indoors by individuals who are vaccinated as well as those who are not vaccinated since the vaccinated have been shown to be able to transmit the virus and the Delta variant has proven to be more virulent than other widespread variants; and

WHEREAS, according to the CDC, the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus is almost as contagious as the chickenpox virus and can result in unvaccinated individuals getting much sicker than prior variants much more rapidly and can result in break through infections in vaccinated individuals, although generally with far milder symptoms; and

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners has received expert testimony stating that the infection rate for the Delta variant (R_0) is 8, meaning that one individual can infect up to 8 others with the virus as opposed to the Alpha variant which had a value of 3, meaning that 1 person could infect 3 persons; and

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WHEREAS, a vaccine is available for all individuals above the age of 12, and the vaccination rate in Alachua County has reached 66% with 156,882 vaccinated and the number of those getting vaccinated decreased to 1,991 for the week of August 27th; and

WHEREAS, during the week of August 27th, the new rate of positivity for COVID-19 dropped to 11.9%, which was a decrease from the prior week due to the large number of those tested, but still remains among the highest it has been during the pandemic to date. Despite the reduction in the rate, the number of those who tested positive increased to 1,520 which was above the number from the week ending August 20th; and

WHEREAS, due to the regional nature of our health care facilities, our hospitals continue to have a significant increase in the number of individuals requiring ambulance transport, hospitalization and placement in the ICU's although there has been a decrease from the hospitalization numbers reported by the State last week; and

WHEREAS, the admissions to the hospitals in Alachua County for COVID-19 are significantly higher for the unvaccinated than for the vaccinated; and

WHEREAS, with the continuing increase in hospitalizations and community spread, there is likely to be an impact on county operations and the ability to provide public services in a timely manner; and

WHEREAS, the data from hospitals demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of individuals hospitalized with COVID-19 are not vaccinated, and there is an increase in the number of pediatric hospitalizations, patients on ventilators and ICU cases due to COVID-19. The overall vaccination level is 66% of individuals eligible, but the Delta variant has shown that the vaccination rate for reaching community immunity could be much higher. Because of the increase in positivity

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and infection, the Alachua County Health Department has increased its hours of operation at the main location for vaccination and testing. The Health Department's recommendation is to get vaccinated follow CDC guidelines, wear a mask, socially distance, avoid crowds and wash your hands often. The Board recognizes that the most important thing that the public can do to stop community spread is to get vaccinated; and

WHEREAS, local hospitals are limiting elective and outpatient surgeries in direct response to the increased demands on the hospitals to care for COVID-19 infected patients. Elective surgery includes surgeries which may be quite important but are not considered at the moment to be life threatening. Examples include cardiac, joint replacement and cancer surgeries; and

WHEREAS, the Board received expert testimony that, until those who are unvaccinated and are capable of getting vaccinated obtain the full vaccination, indoor masking is absolutely essential as an additional mitigation strategy to reduce the community spread of this disease, which will in turn reduce the burden upon the health system.

WHEREAS, the current Delta variant is impacting younger individuals now more than the earlier variations. Most of people hospitalized for the condition locally are below 50; and

WHEREAS, fully vaccinated people with the Delta variant may infect others; and

WHEREAS, the Board heard from an expert who, over the past year and a half, has been monitoring the spread of COVID-19 and its mutations from an epidemiological standpoint. His opinion was that the current surge is not a seasonal surge. This is a new phenomenon. This virus mutates. The wider its spread, the quicker its mutation. The current Delta Variant is more aggressive, more infectious and perhaps more pathogenic than the Alpha variant, and there has been a surge in hospitalizations and the hospitalization of young people. In his opinion, community immunity for

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COVID-19 may not be possible and may not be able to be achieved. While there is some immunity from being infected, it is temporary, and there have been outbreaks from those who have been infected before. Individuals who have been vaccinated have also been noted as being infected, although often with lesser symptoms than the unvaccinated. Vaccination and the other mitigation measures together will limit the spread of the condition. Over time the presence of different mutations of COVID-19 present in Alachua County has changed. In June, the Delta variant began to be noted at 65 individual cases and, in July, that number went up to 42% of all cases. It is expected that this percentage will increase. In addition, with the Delta variant, there is an increasing trend in individuals who have been vaccinated contracting the condition. While he stated it was possible for the virus to become resistant or mutate to the point where a new vaccine is necessary, it is not at that point now and increasing the number of people vaccinated may delay or prevent that from happening. He also stated that a number of outbreaks occur where people gather, such as in workplaces; and

WHEREAS, even with recovery from COVID-19, the recovery may involve permanent impairments including, but not limited to pulmonary damage including pulmonary fibrosis which can lead to reduced lung capacity and potentially lung transplants; and

WHEREAS, based upon the testimony provided to the Board by those scientists and medical professionals who have come before it, and recently testified in public meetings, along with the recommendations of the CDC, OSHA and various studies the Board has considered, the Board believes the use of face masks as recommended by the CDC reduces significantly the spread of the COVID-19 by the individual wearing a face mask and additionally lowers the inhalation of the virus by those individuals wearing masks when in an area around other individuals wearing masks; and

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WHEREAS, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has issued “Guidance on Mitigating and Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace” which as of August 13th, 2021, adopted recommendations similar to the CDC and recommended the wearing of face masks in the work place by individuals; and

WHEREAS, while it is important that all individuals who are capable of getting vaccinated do so, the vaccinations take time to take full effect and wearing a face mask is immediately effective and an effective mitigation strategy; and

WHEREAS, the use of face masks will reduce the amount of viral spread prior to, at, or after the peak of infections caused by the Delta variant and will reduce the number of infections in the community reducing the stress which is currently on our local healthcare facilities and governmental services; and

WHEREAS, there have been incidents reported to the County of some employers refusing to allow their employees to wear face masks; and

WHEREAS, there is a need to ensure that the message of the need to wear a face mask is communicated to all individuals entering into businesses and other public occupancies and the posting of a sign setting forth the requirements of this Order will accomplish this need; and

WHEREAS, the impact of the return of students to the University of Florida and Santa Fe College may not be known for at least two weeks; and

WHEREAS, the University of Florida will be hosting football games this upcoming weekend which will involve a large number of individuals from outside the community coming into Alachua County and having contact with residents. The impact of that influx of individuals into the community and any potential resulting increase in the community spread of COVID-19 is unknown; and

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WHEREAS, information regarding infection and vaccination rates from the Florida Department of Health is now released weekly rather than daily as it was earlier this year; and

WHEREAS, the Florida Legislature in Chapter 2021-8, Laws of Florida, amended Section 252.38(4) to limit the actions of political subdivision in enacting emergency orders which limit the rights or liberties of individuals or businesses within the political subdivision; and

WHEREAS, the legislation requires that any such emergency order must be narrowly tailored to serve a compelling public health or safety purpose. Further any such emergency order must be limited in duration, applicability and scope in order to reduce any infringement on individual rights or liberties to the greatest extent possible. Any such order automatically expires 7 days after issuance but may be extended by a majority vote of the Board in 7 day increments for no more than 42 days (6 weeks). This Order having been renewed twice may be renewed 3 more times after this renewal; and

WHEREAS, Alachua County is a Charter County and has the constitutional authority to enact laws which are not in conflict with general or special laws; and

WHEREAS, the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners as the Official Authority has declared a local state of emergency based upon the current situation arising from the impact of the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus

THEREFORE, BE IT ORDERED, by the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners that:

1. The above recitals are true.
2. The Board of County Commissioners finds the following:
 - A. That the most effective way to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus is through the concerted action of all residents in Alachua County.

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B. That the evidence is overwhelming that it is imperative that those individuals who are not vaccinated and are able to get vaccinated obtain the vaccine for the purposes of reducing the strain on local hospitals which Alachua County is currently experiencing and to slow the spread of the virus so that fewer individuals are impacted by the virus and those who are unable to receive the inoculations are provided with some level of protection by a higher level of vaccination in the local population.

C. That the evidence also supports the use of face masks indoors in locations where the public does business or gathers, excluding private residences by all individuals regardless of their vaccination status along with social distancing, avoiding crowds and the frequent washing of one's hands. These are the recommendations of the CDC and of OSHA.

D. That there is a compelling governmental interest in reducing community spread of COVID-19 in Alachua County so to limit the impact of the absence of workers in their employments and to reduce the admissions to the hospitals and stress on the medical transport system to the extent that those admissions are from Alachua County.

E. That there is a compelling public health and safety need for Alachua County to require face masks to be worn in public indoor spaces including businesses and locations other than private residences. It is recognized that there will be locations where because of adequate distancing – e.g., sitting alone in one's office – may exist where not wearing a face mask would not contribute to community spread and therefore this is an exception to the general rule of wearing a face mask. In addition, it is recognized that face masks cannot be worn while eating or drinking, therefore this is an exception to the general rule of wearing a face mask.

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F. That there is a compelling need that the public be reminded or made aware of the need to wear a face mask upon entry into enclosed spaces and this can be accomplished by requiring signage regarding the requirements of this Order at every public occupancy covered by this Order.

G. That for the reasons set forth in this Emergency Order (including its preamble), the Board of County Commissioners finds that this Emergency Order is narrowly tailored to serve a compelling public health and/or safety purpose. This Emergency Order applies the least intrusive method available to achieve the compelling goal.

3. THE BOARD ORDERS THAT:

A. A face mask shall be worn in all indoor places when there are more than two people present, with exceptions as provided by this Emergency Order. This requirement excludes private residences or spaces occupied by a single-family unit.

B. Such face masks shall be of a nature approved by the CDC and shall cover the mouth and nose and loop securely around the head or ears.

C. That based upon the standards set forth by OSHA (“Occupational Safety and Health Administration”), an employer shall not prevent its employees from wearing face masks in accordance with the recommendations of OSHA and this Order. However, the business owner or their representative may prescribe the nature of the mask to be worn as long as it meets the requirements of OSHA and is not required to allow the use of any personal protection equipment which carries an obscene message or one that is not appropriate.

D. Face masks shall not be required for children under six, (although it is encouraged that children ages 2-5 wear masks), persons who have trouble breathing due to a chronic pre-existing condition or individuals with a documented or demonstrable medical problem. It is the intent of

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this provision that those individuals who cannot tolerate a face mask for a medical, sensory or any other condition, which makes it difficult for them to utilize a face mask and function in public, are not required to wear one. It is recognized that this requirement is broader than what might be considered a covered condition under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Individuals who believes that they meet this exception are not required to show documentation of their condition but should be able to describe their limitation in general terms. Wearing face masks shall not be required while eating or drinking.

E. Public places covered by this Order where the public gathers inside, including businesses, non-profit entities and similar organizations, shall post and display a sign setting forth the requirements of this Order regarding face masks at all locations where the public enters a building in manner and location that is clearly visible. A copy of a sign meeting these requirements is available from the County.

F. This Emergency Order applies to incorporated and unincorporated areas within Alachua County, but has no application outside of Alachua County. Municipalities have the authority to enforce this Emergency Order within their jurisdiction. Municipalities are authorized to impose regulations, which are more stringent than those set forth herein.

G. This Emergency Order does not apply to the internal operations or policies of local governments within the County, the Alachua County Public Schools, local Charter Schools established by law, the State University System, State College System, the State of Florida, or federal agencies who are encouraged to adopt their own rules and procedures regarding the matters set forth herein.

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H. A violation of this Emergency Order does not authorize the search or arrest of any individual. A violation of this Order is a noncriminal infraction. Prior to issuing any citation, the individual will be asked to comply with this Order or be able to explain how any exemption or exception under this Order applies to them. Failure to comply with the requirements of this Order presents a serious threat to the public health, safety, and welfare, pursuant to Chapt. 162, Fla. Stat., and a citation may be issued immediately for such violation. The County shall enforce the first violation of section 3 of this Emergency Order through a fine of \$125.00 to the violator. The second violation of section 3 of this Emergency Order shall be subject to a fine of \$250.00 to the violator. All subsequent violations of section 3 of this Order shall constitute a Class V violation under Art. II, Chapt. 24 of the Alachua County Code of Ordinances, requiring a mandatory court appearance and subject to a fine not to exceed \$500.00. The municipalities may enforce this Order as provided by Florida law and municipal code.

4. This Emergency Order shall last for 7 days and will expire no later than September 9th, 2021. Pursuant to Section 252.38(4)(c), the Board of County Commissioners may extend this Order by majority vote in 7 day increments not to exceed a total of 42 days if the circumstances warrant. Those conditions shall include a significant reduction in community spread of the Delta variant and the return to the ability of hospitals to return to providing elective surgeries and care.
5. This Emergency Order shall be effective upon filing with the Clerk of Courts. If it is not filed with the Clerk within 3 days of issuance it shall be considered void.
6. This Emergency Order shall take effect on the 2nd Day of September, 2021 beginning at 5:00 p.m. EDT.

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Dated this 2nd day of September, 2021 at 10:45 a.m.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA

By: 

Ken Cornell, Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:



County Attorney's Office