

**AS PREPARED ADDRESS TO OHIO
GOVERNOR MIKE DEWINE
OHIO STATEHOUSE
COLUMBUS, OH
NOVEMBER 11, 2020**

My Fellow Ohioans....

On Monday, our country received some very promising news regarding a coronavirus vaccine that Pfizer is developing. The first results from “Phase Three” -- the final research phase on their vaccine -- show it to be very effective in preventing COVID-19.

This should give us all great hope. It could be here as early as December, and we will be ready to get it out just as soon as we receive it!

We have been told that it will come in batches. In the first several months, our priority will be to get it out to protect the most vulnerable and to protect our essential health workers. We will then be able to move to the general population. At some point after that, we hope to achieve significant immunity in Ohio.

But tonight, I want to talk to you about what we do -- until then.

We are now at the most crucial phase of the pandemic.

We are in the midst of our third wave in Ohio.

In the spring, as the virus first surged, we shut things down. Ohioans did what they had to do. We flattened the curve, and we were able to open back up.

In the summer, we got hit again. The virus was heaviest in our urban areas, and so some of our mayors and our Ohio Department of Health issued mask orders in these hot spots. Mask wearing in those areas went up dramatically -- and as a result, cases dropped dramatically.

We are now seeing our third spike. But, this time, things are much different.

We had been warned that when it got colder and drier and people were indoors more, the virus would rise up again.

And it certainly has.

This surge is much more intense, widespread, and dangerous. As of today, every single one of our 88 counties has a high rate of virus spread, and areas of our state that were previously untouched -- our rural areas -- are being hit especially hard.

Let’s look at the numbers.

At the end of September, we were averaging under 1,000 cases per day. Today, we reported our second highest number of cases at nearly 5,900 cases, while yesterday, we reached the highest number yet of over 6,500 cases.

Now, I know that some people say that the only reason we are seeing more cases is because we are doing more testing. Well, we are doing more testing. But, the fact is that while testing has not even doubled, cases have gone up almost four times.

Let's talk about our fellow Ohioans who are in the hospital right now with COVID-19.

During the spring and summer virus surges, the most COVID patients we ever had in the hospital at one time was a little over 1,100. Last week, we were at almost 2,000 COVID patients in our hospitals. And today -- one week later -- we are approaching 3,000.

We now also have a record number of patients in our Intensive Care Units (ICUs). A month ago, 240 patients with COVID were in the ICU receiving critical care. Tonight, more than 700 of our fellow Ohioans are in the ICU.

We've learned throughout this pandemic that what happens today sometimes won't reveal its full impact for weeks. This is certainly true of hospitalizations -- and sadly, it is also true of deaths, leaving us with the stark reality that we simply won't know the ultimate fate of individuals who are diagnosed today with COVID for weeks or even months.

Despite great work by our medical personnel and improved treatments for COVID, too many of our fellow citizens are dying. In the first week of October, 86 Ohioans died from COVID-19. With many more Ohioans testing positive for COVID today, we know that number will surely grow. It already has.

During the first week of November, 104 Ohioans died -- 104 mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters -- 104 families left to mourn and grieve a loved one.

To those families -- know that Ohio grieves with you.

Let's talk about our nurses, doctors, and all those who care for COVID-19 patients.

Our hospitals are functioning right now as if they were at the peak of the flu season in January. But unlike the flu, when hospital personnel know cases will begin to drop and come to an end in the late winter and early spring, these new COVID cases are not trending down, and it is taking an enormous human toll on our healthcare workers.

In the spring, we wanted to be sure we had enough Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), ventilators, and hospital space. Today, the question is whether or not we will have enough people. Our healthcare workers are exhausted. They have been running a marathon for nine months straight, and with this new wave and the onset of flu season, it's like they are starting the race all over again.

If we don't change this, we won't be able to provide appropriate care for all the Ohioans who need it for COVID and for all those Ohioans who require other emergency care for things like accidents, strokes, and heart attacks. Hospitals will again be forced to postpone important, but less urgent care.

Make no mistake, if nothing changes, this all could happen in just a few short weeks.

Today, I have been asked by our hospital leaders to confirm that Ohio remains in a state of emergency. It most certainly does. This state of emergency supports their ongoing efforts to make staffing adjustments in accordance with CDC guidance, as they work to care for our rising number of COVID-19 hospital patients.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that "every crisis has both its dangers and its opportunities." In this most dangerous phase of the pandemic, as Ohioans, we still have opportunities before us.

We can control our fate, and the good news is that we don't have to search for the tools to fight back. They are ready at hand! We have used them effectively before, and we must use them effectively again.

We must get back to the basics -- wearing a mask, maintaining at least six feet of distance from others, washing our hands frequently, not having parties and get-togethers in your house, and trying to get adequate fresh air into our homes.

What each Ohioan does in his or her own life, impacts all of us.

It impacts every community.

It impacts every school, every nursing home, every hospital, every business.

And the more people who get the virus, the more likely it will spread to all the places that we desperately want -- and need -- to keep open and operating.

Just yesterday, I received a letter from a local school superintendent concerned about community spread. She said that people "don't seem to understand that while [COVID] exposures are occurring outside of the school setting, they are having a profound effect on our ability to remain open."

The simple truth is that your local school won't be able to stay open if it can't keep teachers in the classroom and bus drivers in buses. The virus threatens our ability to keep our grandparents safe in nursing homes, our hospitals functioning, our businesses open, and our citizens working.

We must do the basic and necessary things to protect those at the front lines -- our nurses and doctors treating patients, our grocery store workers who are keeping our stores open, our teachers and bus drivers and childcare workers who are helping our children. People like Jen, who is a nurse at OhioHealth.

During the start of the pandemic, she was on medical leave courageously fighting breast cancer. As soon as she was medically cleared, Jen jumped right back into action and returned to work, first managing patient cases over the phone and now caring directly for patients. She wears a mask at all times and stays home while not working to stay safe and to protect her elderly parents and her patients.

As we wait for the vaccine, we have so much to protect. We cannot surrender to this virus and let it run wild until enough of us get the vaccine. It is advancing quickly and seeking victims in every community in Ohio.

If you don't know any of its victims yet -- sadly, you will.

New Mask Order

Throughout the pandemic, most people and most businesses in Ohio have done things right, by wearing masks and ensuring that safety guidelines are followed. We are grateful for that. It is those actions that kept the virus from spreading uncontrollably in the spring and summer.

Today, every Ohioan lives in a county where there is a high incidence of the virus. Most retail businesses have done a good job providing a safe place for their employees to work and for their customers to shop. However, it is clear there are some business where mask wearing is simply lacking.

We know that masks work. They are the easiest, most cost-effective way to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Every retail employee has the right to work in an environment that is as safe as can be, which means all customers must wear masks. Further, each Ohioan who goes out to shop has the right to know that every store they enter will be safe and the people they encounter in that store will be wearing a mask. Our mask order, issued on July 23rd, in fact says just that.

Today, we will re-issue that order with three additional provisions:

1. Each business will be required to post a Face Covering Requirement sign at all public entrances to the store;
2. Each store will be responsible for ensuring that customers and employees are wearing masks; and
3. We are forming a new Retail Compliance Unit, comprised of agents led by the Bureau of Workers Compensation. They will be inspecting to ensure compliance. A first violation of this order will bring about a written warning and a second violation will bring about closure of the store for up to 24 hours.

We must do this to protect our frontline workers. Let me tell you about Ashley, who is a meat and seafood specialist for Kroger in Columbus. She has been with Kroger for five years. Ashley

has severe asthma and a chronic lung condition. She's an only child and an only grandchild, and because many of her immediate family members have compromised immune systems, she has not visited her parents and grandparents since March. We need to follow the safety guidelines so she can stay well and see her family again soon!

New Social Gathering Order

As we implement the new mask order, it is essential that we also remember the existing orders that are already in place to slow the spread of the virus. In April, we issued an order to limit gatherings of more than 10 people. That limit has been -- and still very much is -- in effect. This applies to public events and private gatherings.

Despite this order, we have seen rampant spread of the virus as a result of banquets, wedding receptions, and social gatherings following funerals. We have seen great tragedy associated with such events. It's not the ceremonies causing the problem. It's the party afterward.

To address this, we will be issuing a new order in the next few days that will place significant new restrictions on these social activities. Specifically, open congregate areas can no longer be open. This requires everyone to be seated and masked unless they are actively consuming food or drinks and prohibits things, such as dancing and games.

Bars/Restaurants/Fitness Centers

Now, let's turn to bars, restaurants, and fitness centers.

If the current trend continues and cases keep increasing, we will be forced to close restaurants, bars, and fitness centers one week from tomorrow. I am very well aware of the burden this will place on employees and the owners. But, these are places where it is difficult or impossible to maintain mask-wearing, which we know now is the chief way of slowing this virus.

Schools

We also must wear our masks to keep our kids in school. Our K through 12 schools are doing a fantastic job, and I thank them. I believe that most children are better off in school than learning remotely. However, as the increasing surge threatens school districts' ability to keep teachers in the classroom, some schools are starting to shift to virtual learning, so we must do everything in our power to slow this virus down so our kids can stay in school.

I want to also thank our colleges and universities for agreeing to not return to in-person classes after Thanksgiving, but to finish the semester remotely. The vast majority of schools have made this decision, and reducing the number of students on campuses has made a significant difference in keeping our cases low and our campuses safer. But, unless we dramatically slow the community spread of the virus, our higher education institutions may have to remain virtual when school opens in January.

My Fellow Ohioans -- I know you're tired. I know you're weary. I know you want this to be over. But in words often attributed to Winston Churchill during some of the darkest times in World War II, "When you're going through hell -- keep going!"

And so tonight, I ask you to keep going! Recommit to your individual efforts to stay safe, because what you do in your private lives affects everyone.

Please -- please don't host that birthday party or that baby shower or that kids sleepover or that get-to-together to watch the football game.

Please don't attend the gathering you were invited to. Stay home when you can. Work from home if you can.

And as we approach the upcoming Thanksgiving Day holiday, please remember that when someone you don't live with enters your "bubble," it puts everyone you live with at risk. Even our family and our closest friends can bring COVID into our homes. They don't do it intentionally, but it happens when they don't know they have the virus, and we just need to avoid any unnecessary and additional risks right now.

But, if you are going to be with people who don't live in your home and if you feel there is something you just have to do, please just make sure everyone is wearing a mask

CONCLUSION

Today is Veterans Day. We honor and remember all our men and women who have served our country. They understand what it means to serve a cause greater than themselves.

This pandemic gives each of us the chance to serve a higher cause -- a more noble purpose than just ourselves. None of us could easily forgive ourselves if we learned that a loved one contracted the virus because we had it and did not know it.

It's just not worth the chance.

My Fellow Ohioans -- Few times in our lives will we ever be able to do something or refrain from doing something that will or can save a life. This is one of those rare times.

Throughout our country's history, each generation has faced unique challenges. In generations gone by, Americans have been asked to lay down their lives that our nation might live. Today, we all must do something far less dramatic -- wear a mask that your friends, neighbors, and family members might live.

All of our living generations are facing the same challenge at the same time. Ohioans have not faced such a collective challenge in 100 years, and whether you are five, 15, 25, 50, or 80 years-old, you are facing this same challenge and have the same opportunities.

On Sunday, Fran and I were blessed with a new baby granddaughter, and a grandson is due any day now!

Each of us has reasons why we want to be here when this horrible virus is over. And when we decide whether or not to put on that mask -- we should remember all of those things that we really want to live for.

All of the world's great religions have their own version of what most of us learned as children as the "Golden Rule." Treat others as we wish to be treated.

Whether you were raised in a religious household or not and whether you adhere to religious teachings or not, all of our most revered teachings are based on the principle of believing in -- and working for -- something bigger than ourselves.

It's the common good. And, there is no higher purpose than to work for that common good. Each one of us -- has a moral obligation to do our part. And this we will do,

Our beautiful Ohio state seal depicts the sun shining brightly over Mt. Logan in Ross County. That rising sun holds the promise that the light IS coming!

The dawn is near!

And we will get through this together!