**TIPTON COUNTY GOVERNMENT**

 December 7, 2020

**PRESS RELEASE**

 On July 3, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee signed Executive Order 54 to grant county

mayors in 89 counties the authority to issue local requirements that citizens wear face coverings

in public places in order to slow the spread of COVID19 cases which have risen substantially in recent

weeks. Governor Lee encouraged every Tennessean to use a face covering or mask,

to socially distance and to wash hands frequently.

 After much consideration, County Executive Jeff Huffman finds that wearing a cloth or other face covering should be required in certain circumstances in Tipton County. Executive Huffman recognizes that there are many varying opinions on this issue, but believes that asking Tipton Countians to wear a face covering in indoor public places, and in outdoor public places where distancing is not possible, is a necessary safety measure in order that our local businesses and schools may remain open. Allowing the current spike in cases to continue jeopardizes our businesses, government and court operations, schools, and way of life; and this simple measure can help to protect our citizens during this unprecedented time. Additionally, and this is vitally important, **hospital capacity, particularly ICU bed capacity is at a critical point now. Locally, Baptist Hospital-Tipton has transferred ICU patients to Georgia, Kentucky, and Central Mississippi because no ICU beds were available in our region.**  Jackson General Hospital in Madison County, Tennessee is no longer taking transfers to its hospital in Jackson, Tennessee. **The lack of ICU capacity now affects not only COVID-19 patients, but other patients that need ICU care as well.** This capacity challenge cannot be ignored.

County Executive Huffman meets regularly with Emergency Management Director Tommy Dunavant, Director of Tipton County Schools Dr. John Combs, Tipton County Sheriff Pancho Chumley, and Baptist Memorial Hospital—Tipton CEO Parker Harris to monitor the situation.

County Executive Huffman has also received a letter signed by the CEOs of Baptist, Methodist, Regional One, and St. Francis Hospitals urging the enactment of a county-wide masking requirement. As the letter states, “as we approach the holiday season, we feel it is more important to (enact a masking requirement) now than at any other point in the fight against COVID-19.”

Tipton County Schools are currently still in session and hope to continue with face to face instruction with students. Tipton County Schools Director Dr. John Combs states, “Our current facial covering guidelines require students and staff to wear masks in areas of the school, including classrooms and buses, where social distancing is not possible…but we know this isn’t enough. Our plea to parents and community members is that you help by following similar guidelines when you are out in our community. Since most of our positive cases and quarantines are stemming from outside our school buildings, your help is absolutely needed to keep our kids in school.”

Parker Harris, CEO, Baptist Memorial Hospital—Tipton states, “We saw the effectiveness of wearing masks and social distancing in the early summer when new cases declined by 56% and hospitalizations fell by 38% in just six weeks after Tennesseans widely practiced these important safety precautions. As COVID-19 cases continue to surge, it remains of the utmost importance that we continue to do these things to keep our community and neighbors safe and healthy.”

The Tennessee Supreme Court has already issued an Order Extending the State of Emergency and Suspending Jury Trials. All jury trials are suspended through January 31, 2021, subject only to exceptions which may be granted by the Chief Justice on a case-by-case basis.

 Keeping in mind that Tipton County and its residents are known for caring for one another and setting good examples, especially when it comes to the health and safety of our loved ones and our neighbors,

the attached county-wide Executive Order, granted by the authority of the Governor of the State of

Tennessee, is hereby enacted requiring citizens to wear masks or face coverings when in public places and social distancing is not possible, with an effective date of December 8, 2020 at 11:59 pm in Tipton County. Citizens should carefully read the order, as there are a number of exceptions based upon specific health or safety issues, as well as situations where individuals can safely distance and do not need to wear face coverings for their safety. This order is set to expire at midnight on January 31, 2021.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Jeff Huffman

Tipton County Executive

**TIPTON COUNTY GOVERNMENT**

**DECLARATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY BY TIPTON COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

**Whereas,** thePresident of the United States, the Governor of the State of Tennessee, and the Mayors of a number of municipalities in the state of Tennessee have made emergency declarations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and have recognized it as a public health emergency; **and**

**Whereas,** the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) advise the use of cloth or other types of face coverings to slow the spread of COVID-19; **and**

**Whereas,** immediate action to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our communities is necessary in order to be able to safely allow governmental operations to continue, businesses to remain open, and schools to reopen in the fall; **and**

**Whereas,** widespread use of face coverings is believed to be effective in slowing the spread of COVID-19 by reducing the chances of symptomatic and asymptomatic people transmitting the virus to others, especially when used together with other protocols including 6-foot distancing and hand hygiene; **and**

**Whereas,** Governor Bill Lee signed Executive Order 54, strongly urging all persons to wear cloth face coverings in public settings where being in close proximity to others is anticipated; **and**

**Whereas,** Governor Lee, through Executive Order 54, delegated authority to county mayors in the 89 counties that do not have a locally-run health department (including Tipton County) to issue orders requiring the wearing of face coverings within their jurisdictions, subject to certain limitations, for the purpose of slowing the spread of COVID-19; **and**

**Whereas,** the number of COVID-19 related deaths continue to rise in Tipton County and surrounding counties; **and**

**Whereas,** widespread use of face coverings is a preferred alternative to the closing of schools and the closure of businesses in our community, which closures would likely become necessary if action is not taken; **and**

**Whereas,** after consultation with the medical community, the Tennessee Department of Health, the local COVID-19 Task Force, and Baptist Hospital, the County Executive finds that there is a consensus that the wearing of cloth or other face coverings should be required in certain circumstances, and that such a requirement should take effect as soon as possible;

**NOW, THEREFORE, PURSUANT TO THE AUTHORITY DELEGATED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER 54 AND PURSUANT TO GOVERNOR LEE’S RECOGNITION OF A CONTINUING STATE OF EMERGENCY AND MAJOR DISASTER RELATED TO COVID-19,** the County Executive of Tipton County, Tennessee issues a Declaration of Emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and

**IT IS ORDERED** that cloth or other face coverings that cover the nose and mouth of a person to impede the spread of the virus during speaking, coughing, sneezing or other action, shall be required in Tipton County, Tennessee , within all publicly-accessible areas of commercial business establishments; in public outdoor areas where social distancing of a least six feet cannot be maintained; and within the publicly-accessible areas of business offices where there is direct interaction with the public and social distancing of at least six feet cannot be maintained. A “commercial business establishment” means any establishment that sells goods or services, or a combination thereof, including but not limited to grocery stores, restaurants, lobbies and public spaces in hotels and other places of lodging, pharmacies, banks, bars, salons, retail stores, medical and dental offices, and entertainment and sports venues.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that this Order does not apply to:

1. Any person who cannot safely wear a face covering because he/she has trouble breathing due to an underlying health condition or another bona fide medical or health-related reason for not wearing a face covering;
2. Anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance;
3. Persons in a private residence;
4. Persons who are outdoors, unless the person cannot substantially maintain appropriate 6-foot social distancing from others outside of the person’s household;
5. Persons while eating or drinking;
6. Person’s in a place of worship (unless a face covering is required by the place of worship), although persons in a place or worship are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings to slow the spread of COVID-19;
7. Persons within private motor vehicles, unless such vehicle is being used for public transportation or a vehicle for hire;
8. Persons working under conditions where appropriate social distancing of at least six feet from others outside the person’s household is substantially maintained;
9. Persons present in government facilities, or on government premises, who shall be subject to the rules and regulations of the governmental entity operating the facility or premises. Persons present in the public areas of all Tipton County government facilities will wear cloth or other face coverings, subject to the age and health restrictions outlined herein, and subject to number 11, below. Other local governmental entities may issue their own directives regarding their facilities;
10. Persons in a voting site for the purpose of voting or administering an election; although such persons are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings to slow the spread of COVID-19;
11. Persons who are engaging in strenuous exercise and/or physical activity, provided, however that such persons shall maintain 6-foot social distancing when not wearing a face covering;
12. Person for whom wearing a face covering would pose a safety or security risk.

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that businesses and facilities subject to this Order shall post signage at public entrances informing patrons of the requirement to wear a mask with the establishment, and shall enforce the requirement within the establishment.

This local order constitutes an order promulgated pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 58, Chapter 2, Part 1. While it is the hope and expectation that Tipton County citizens will comply with this Order out of a sense of civic duty and respect for their fellow citizens, and attempts at education and communication are the preferred methods of obtaining compliance, state law provides for enforcement of this Order if necessary. Pursuant to Executive Order 54 and Tennessee Code $§$58-2-120, violation of this Order shall constitute a Class A misdemeanor.

This order shall become effective at 11:59 p.m. on Monday, December 8, 2020 and will expire on January 31, 2021 at 11:59 p.m., unless cancelled sooner or unless extended.

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Jeff Huffman

Tipton County Executive