



August 30, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The latest information from federal, state and local public health agencies informs us that the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus is surging in our area, causing increased illness and hospitalizations at levels not seen since the spring. For the safety of all who worship at Catholic parishes throughout the Diocese of Cleveland, I strongly encourage you -- whether vaccinated or not vaccinated -- to wear a face mask while attending Mass indoors. All who want to attend Mass, and who are otherwise vulnerable, should feel safe and welcome inside our sacred spaces. Please use charity and patience with those who do not wish to comply with this strongly stated request. You also might want to consider wearing a face mask for other indoor gatherings, especially for those not yet fully vaccinated. Wearing masks outdoors is not generally required except for activities involving close contact with others who are not fully vaccinated.

Those who are ill, have significant health risk factors or care for someone who is immune-compromised or ill, as well as those who have significant fear or anxiety about contracting the coronavirus in a large group of persons are not obliged to attend Mass.

Pope Francis recently offered a message of hope and unity to the world in an effort to continue increasing confidence in the COVID-19 vaccines, specifically in communities disproportionately affected by the virus. "Thanks to God's grace and to the work of many, we now have vaccines to protect us from COVID-19," the pope said. "Getting the vaccines that are authorized by the respective authorities is an act of love. I pray to God that each one of us can make his or her own small gesture of love; no matter how small, love is always grand."

I am fully vaccinated and recommend the same for my family and friends. In consideration of others, I also am wearing a mask during the distribution of holy Communion and I strongly encourage those distributing holy Communion at Mass to wear a mask while distributing as well.

Remember that the situation seems to be ever changing. This request to wear face masks is temporary and will be changed once this current level of increased coronavirus cases is over. Stay connected to information coming from national, state and local health authorities, and stay home and get tested for COVID when you are not feeling well. Following these recommendations will go a long way in helping to keep you and others around you safe.

We are all tired of this pandemic, but we must not forget that we are called to care for the health of others in times of crisis and must continue to protect our healthcare system and medical workers.

May God bless and watch over us in our time of need.

Bishop Edward C. Malesic