

Northern Virginia hospitals collaborate to encourage mask wearing

Aug 17, 2020



Four of Northern Virginia's leading healthcare providers have joined forces to encourage the region's residents to wear masks to help prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The "Wear a mask" public-service campaign launched Aug. 12 with print, digital, and social media messages in English and Spanish encouraging the public to wear masks.

Four Northern Virginia hospital groups are collaborating on the public service campaign that began Aug. 12.

COVID-19 remains a huge risk, according to chief medical officers at the participating providers: HCA Northern Virginia including Dominion, Reston, and Stone Springs Hospitals; Inova Health System; Novant Health UVA Health System; and Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington. They agree that surges occur in communities when masks are not worn in outdoor and indoor public spaces where people gather, as evidenced in other parts of the country.

"We are in this battle against COVID-19 together," said Dr. Thomas Taghon, chief medical officer at Reston Hospital Center. "It doesn't matter your political affiliation, what you do for a living, who you work for, where you live, or how much money you have, COVID-19 is an equal opportunist when it comes to infecting people."

Recent studies in Health Affairs, The Lancet and other medical journals show mask adoption led to a significant slowdown in daily COVID-19 growth rates over time. Internationally, countries that embraced wearing masks or mandated them have had significantly lower infection and death rates due to COVID-19.

"In Northern Virginia, we are succeeding, which is one of the reasons we have been able to progress to Phase 3," said Dr. Stephen J. Motew, chief of clinical enterprise at Fairfax-based Inova Health System. "Infection and death rates in the region have remained stable and relatively low, but we are not out of the woods."

For medical teams treating COVID-19 patients, the hospitals said prevention remains critical and they are relying on the public to do their part by wearing masks, using good hand hygiene and social distancing.

“Science has proven that masks are effective in slowing the transmission of the virus,” said Dr. Zan Zaidi, clinical physician executive for Novant Health UVA Health System, which has facilities in Haymarket, Manassas, Culpeper and elsewhere. “We see this in communities where mask adoption has been embraced — statistics show a reduction in death and infection.”

Clinical leaders agree that wearing masks, washing hands and social distancing is working.

“We cannot let our guard down,” said Dr. Jeffrey DiLisi, senior vice president and chief medical officer at Virginia Hospital Center. “We must keep at it, to protect one another and ourselves from a virus for which there is not yet a vaccine or a cure.”