



**Greater Milwaukee Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's Work. Our Hands.

A Statement from Bishop Erickson  
On CDC Guidance on Mask Wearing by Vaccinated Individuals  
May 20, 2021

Friends in Christ:

Like many of you, I was surprised by the [recent updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) on the use of masks by vaccinated individuals](#). This guidance has caused many businesses and state and local governments to revise their policies, and many are discontinuing their mask mandates and other restrictions. In many ways, this is great news, as we are learning that vaccinated individuals have a reduced risk of transmitting the virus to others.

These developments also raise numerous questions for our congregations and leaders as we try to make decisions that will respect the diverse needs of people attending worship services and other activities. I encourage all our synod's congregations and ministries that are considering resuming in person gatherings to continue to explore ways to do so safely, bearing in mind the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors. I also encourage you to review the [recent guidance issued by the Wisconsin Council of Churches](#).

While we are all tired of the many restrictions brought on by the pandemic, I urge continued caution and thoughtful deliberations as we explore how to move forward, keeping these things in mind:

- The recent CDC guidance addresses the behavior of vaccinated individuals, not large, mixed groups.
- Worship is a public event and congregations need to presume that not all those participating will be vaccinated. Children under 12, people with compromised immune systems, and others who have not had the opportunity to be vaccinated will likely be present.
- People have varying levels of willingness and ability to tolerate risk. Congregations are encouraged to continue to choose practices that minimize risk (worshipping outdoors, limiting singing, wearing masks indoors, etc.) so as to create a welcoming space for all.
- Even though vaccinations are increasing, and infection rates are falling, most counties in our synod have vaccination rates less than 50% and case rates of between 5-10 per 100,000 in population. While we are moving toward a time when it is safer to gather in various ways, we are not out of the woods just yet.

Finally, let me offer a word of deep gratitude. I am convinced that the choices and sacrifices we have made this past year have saved lives, and I am proud of the ways that the congregations and leaders of this synod have prioritized our calling to love and serve our neighbors. Grounded in faith and guided by love, I pray we will continue to discover God's amazing grace and sustaining power.

In love and hope,

Bishop Paul Erickson