

COVID-19 Misconceptions
Health Director Update - 8/28/2020

Good afternoon, Durham, I'm Rod Jenkins. Director of the Durham County Department of Public Health. As we're getting settled into the fall semester and the end of another month of our COVID-19 response, I want to ensure you all remain aware of accurate information you need to stay safe. So today's message will clear up misconceptions and confusion we've heard from the community about COVID-19 data; when to wear face coverings; and what it actually means to be at high-risk.

First, what's going on with COVID-19 data in the state and in the county? As many of you know, you can find Durham County COVID-19 data on our data hub, at the website shown on screen. But some of you have asked questions about how to interpret this data. Looking at this data, it may seem like cases are decreasing, and this may make you feel like it's ok to be less careful in protecting yourself. Well, there is good news and bad news about the data today. The bad news is that the total number of cases confirmed in Durham County and in the state of north carolina, also called the "running case total," has continued to increase every day since March 2020. The good news is we *have* seen decreases in how many cases are being confirmed each day. In other news, we are still seeing case growth every day, but cases are not increasing as quickly as they were before. And this is because of the steps you have taken to practice widespread social distancing and wear face coverings when you are around others.

And speaking of face coverings, I want to clear up a few misunderstandings about when and how to wear these coverings. Remember, it is important to wear these coverings over your mouth *and* nose. If you cover only one or the other, you are not protecting yourself or others as well as you could. As for *when* to wear these coverings, that can be summed up in one sentence: Wear a face covering *any time* you will be within 6 feet of others who are not members of your household, whether you are indoors or outdoors. This means wear it even if you are just running into the store for a few minutes. This also means wear it if you are outdoors if you will not be able to stay safely away from others. And this means you *do not* have to wear it if you will be exercising alone on a track safely distanced from others, or if you are in your home alone with your family. However, if you have visitors in your home, it is important to wear face coverings around each other until they leave your home. But remember, it is still important to stay in your own home, away from others, as much as possible. Masks help reduce the spread of COVID-19, but they alone do not completely eliminate risk. They should be used in combination with social distancing to help stop the spread.

And finally, I want to clear up confusion about what it means to be high-risk, and just importantly, what this *does not* mean. High risk individuals include those who are over 65 years old or have certain underlying health conditions. A full list of risk factors can be found at the CDC web address shown on screen. Being high risk means you are more likely to experience severe illness from COVID-19. This does not necessarily mean these individuals are the most likely to get COVID at all. In other words, people of all ages and health histories can be just as

likely as high risk individuals to become ill with COVID. In fact, more and more young people are getting COVID-19 now than ever before. And we have seen serious, lifelong consequences and even death from COVID 19 even among previously healthy young individuals.

As you can see, Durham, it is critical that *everyone* continue to take steps to stay safe, even as we may be growing tired of adjusting your lives in this way. Please take pride in knowing that we have begun to see progress in slowing the spread, but please also remember that any progress can be quickly and significantly undone if we begin to forget these safety measures now. I want for us all to put this pandemic in the past and get back to safely seeing our friends and loved ones, but we can only get back to normal if we *all* , as a county and a state, do our part. We can do this, Durham.