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Media contact:

Riverside County Joint Information Center
951-955-5087

Public contact: 2-1-1

Riverside County to give out 10 million masks as part of ‘Masks are Medicine’ campaign

As part of a community action plan to reverse the trend in rising cases and stop the spread of COVID-19, Riverside County officials are giving away 10 million masks as part of a new “Masks are Medicine” campaign that includes a pledge campaign.

“Because we do not have a vaccine or cure for COVID, masks are one of the safest, cheapest, and most effective ways to prevent the spread of infection,” said Dr. Geoffrey Leung, ambulatory care director with the Riverside University Health System (RUHS). “Good handwashing, physical distancing, and covering the face can decrease our risk for infection by 95 percent. If we had a medicine that could decrease our risk of getting COVID by 95 percent, everyone would be taking it. This is why we must treat masks as are our medicine.”

The masks will be distributed by local nonprofits working in the community, as well as houses of worship, senior meal delivery programs and local businesses. In addition, everyone who visits a county or state-run testing location, will receive masks. Today, the county distributed more than 50,000 of these masks to local nonprofit organizations.

“We want to give you something beyond words. These masks will help us stop the spread,” said Kim Saruwatari, director of RUHS-Public Health. “We also know that this disease has a disproportionate impact on under privileged communities and communities of color. We don’t want access to face coverings to contribute to that. We will work with our nonprofit partners to get these masks into the hands of the hard to reach populations.”

As an important reminder, the county is asking everyone to join the fight against COVID by making a pledge or promise to wear a face cover whenever leaving the home and to avoid social gatherings. Starting today, visit [PledgeToFightCOVID.com](https://www.riversidecountyca.gov/PledgeToFightCOVID) to sign the pledge and learn more about how you can help us stop the spread and control the pandemic in Riverside County.

“I am especially concerned for our frontline workers, including those working in grocery stores, nursing facilities and agricultural fields. As a matter of fact, farmworkers are contracting the virus at twice the normal rate,” said Board Chair V. Manuel Perez, Fourth District Supervisor. “We all must do our part. Face coverings, along with physical distancing and handwashing, altogether can decrease risk by up to 95 percent. The economy and wearing face coverings go hand-in-hand and should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Masks are the medicine and how we can protect ourselves and our fellow neighbors to get people back to work.”

If each person can encourage one other person to remember to cover the face and avoid social gatherings, Riverside County can reverse the rise in cases during the next 30 days. In this way, the health of our families, community and economy are all tied together.

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