

Statement on COVID-19 Duties

September 14, 2021

This statement recognizes that wearing masks and obtaining vaccinations are moral obligations to help reduce COVID-19 infection and death. Wearing masks and accepting vaccinations are scientifically sound strategies, and their use is guided by an ethical framework of shared values and ideals that promote the common good. Vaccine and mask mandates are ethically permissible, if not obligatory.

COVID-19 is the worst health crisis in Florida in a century. People are falling ill and dying of preventable contagion in record numbers – in large part now because they or others have failed to wear masks or be vaccinated. Such behavior not only imperils others by fostering the transmission of the virus, it has overwhelmed many Florida hospitals; this, in turn, has endangered people seeking medical attention for maladies and injuries unrelated to COVID-19.

Because the evidence is clear that masks and vaccines are safe and effective, and the return to a connected and functioning society depends on the cooperation and support of its members the Advisory Board of the Florida Bioethics Network affirms that:

- 1. Wearing masks and accepting recommended vaccines are ethical obligations during public health emergencies to decrease the transmission of the COVID virus and alleviate the burden on Florida hospitals while protecting the entire population.**
- 2. The argument against requiring the use of masks in public places, especially classrooms, does not address the predictable consequences of increased infections. The use of masks is a minor inconvenience to endure for the sake of community health.**
- 3. Civil society relies on timely, accurate and comprehensive information to gauge risks of infection and the merits of various interventions. This public health data should guide policy decisions and be easily accessible.**
- 4. Marginalized and vulnerable communities should receive culturally appropriate outreach and equal access to vaccines, masks, testing programs and legitimate treatments.**
- 5. Opportunities for community debate over public health goals, options and the balancing of rights and privileges will build mutual understanding and trust in the public health mission.**

This statement is offered by a variety of health care and ethics experts who are officially neutral regarding the political controversies surrounding the appropriate management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Florida. It is intended to provide a view of this crisis that prioritizes the greatest good for the greatest number and the mutual protection of all. Ethics standards require the sharing of burdens so that one group is not disadvantaged by others' acts of omission or commission. The ultimate rewards of a collective commitment to solidarity, beneficence and reciprocity will not only protect individuals but ensure a strong, healthy and resilient society.

This is the fourth FBN statement on ethical issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Other statements, and additional resources, are available at <https://fbn.miami.edu/resources/covid-19-resources>.