



Nov. 16, 2020

To all elected government and municipal officials in Joplin, Webb City, Carl Junction, Carthage and Neosho, and to the County Commissioners of Newton and Jasper Counties:

The health care community in Southwest Missouri began taking steps to address COVID-19 more than 200 days ago. Many procedures that people in the community needed were postponed. The difficult decision to close hospital and clinic doors to the visitors that we know make our patients more comfortable was made in numerous places. We all worked to procure personal protective equipment our nurses and doctors needed as they prepared to care for COVID patients. All of these things were done to make sure Joplin's hospitals weren't overwhelmed, but also to protect as many people as possible.

Early in the pandemic, we were able to rely on the knowledge that we were just an hour or so's drive from other hospitals in the area where, if needed, patients could be transferred. That option is not as dependable any longer as those communities handle their own outbreaks of COVID-19, and the surge in hospitalizations that comes with them.

At what felt like the most critical point in this pandemic, The Joplin City Council acted in an attempt to help slow the spread and flatten the curve by enacting a mask mandate. While the mask mandate was being discussed, and when it was in place, COVID-19 hospitalizations consistently stayed at a manageable level in the community.

In recent days, those numbers have spiked dramatically. More ventilators are being used in our hospitals than ever before. We are now concerned about the possibility of the number of hospitalizations climbing even higher and what that would mean for our capacity and ability to handle both COVID-19 and the myriad other reasons people end up in one of our hospital beds.

People follow rules, and they follow leaders. **We urge you to take the lead on this issue and ultimately enact another mask mandate for the cities of Joplin, Webb City, Carl Junction, Carthage, Neosho, and all of Jasper and Newton Counties.** This is for the explicit purpose of reducing the spread of COVID-19 in our community, which we know is the only way to reduce the number of sick people in our hospital. Wait times in the ER are getting longer and the availability of hospital beds in our community and others are diminishing.

The health care community has a limit on resources, and we are approaching it. This pandemic is affecting everyone and we are asking for help in protecting and keeping people out of the hospital by reducing the transmission of the virus in our community. It has long been clear, and never more so than now: We are in a public health crisis.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Drinkwitz
President
Mercy Hospital Joplin

Dr. Tracy Godfrey
President
Mercy Clinic Joplin

Paula F. Baker
President & CEO
Freeman Health System

Dr. Marc Hahn
President & CEO
Kansas City University

Stephanie Brady
Executive Director
Community Clinic

Don McBride
CEO
Access Family Care

Tony Moehr
Administrator
Jasper County Health Department