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Research shows masks may be the key to containing COVID-19

Masks become political flash-point in US, but scientific evidence is overwhelming

BY PETER ALESHIRE
Special to the Independent

ARIZONA — Masks have become a cultural flashpoint, in the long shadow of the pandemic. Masks — or the lack of masks — have spurred bitter arguments in the checkout lines, attacks on store clerks, defiance by small-town mayors, fashion statements and political rants. Nonetheless, doctors, governors and the federal Centers for Disease Control now urge everyone wear masks in public — especially if

they can't stay six feet apart. So how did advice from doctors become so controversial? Why did the US Surgeon General initially warn people not to wear masks? Most importantly — will widespread mask-wearing blunt the frightening second wave of infections now plaguing Arizona and much of the West and South? Short answer to that last crucial question? Yes. A growing body of research suggests that widespread mask wearing by the healthy and the sick alike can slow down the spread of the virus as effectively as closing businesses and rarely leaving the house.

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Peter Aleshire/Special to the Independent
The combination of social distancing and wearing a mask provides the best protection from a virus that spreads mostly through the air, according to the research.



Karen Warnick/The Independent

The theme of the 2020 4th of July parade was 'United We Stand.'

Thousands enjoy Round Valley 4th of July Parade

BY KAREN WARNICK
The Independent

WHITE MOUNTAINS — Americans of all colors, faiths, ages, and politics, came together for a few hours to celebrate what this country was built on: freedom. There was no social distancing, no masks, and no fear. There were lots and lots of American flags, candy, small water balloons and fun. With all other communities in

the White Mountains cancelling 4th of July events, except a few fireworks shows, thousands descended on Springerville-Eagar to celebrate the birth of our nation. There was no protesting, no rioting, and lots of smiles and cheering. There were classic cars and trucks of all kinds, ATVs, motorcycles, floats, dancing and music. It's too bad other communities didn't let their citizens

celebrate such an important day and enjoy a respite from the fear that has held this country hostage. It was a welcome coming together of people enjoying a sense of normalcy. Thank you to the towns of Springerville and Eagar for not cancelling.

Reach the reporter at kwarnick@wmicentral.com

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State delays school opening

Research suggests children less vulnerable to pandemic — but they can still spread it to family members

BY PETER ALESHIRE
Special to The Independent

ARIZONA — Gov. Doug Ducey this week pushed back any in-person school re-openings until August 17, giving school officials another two weeks to prepare for their plunge into the unknown. The order came as confirmed cases of COVID-19 exploded and the state re-imposed an order to close non-essential businesses, lifted on May 15. The stutter-step on reopening schools comes amid intriguing research showing that children are not only much less likely to get infected with COVID-19, but once infected they're much less likely to develop symptoms. On the other hand, research has also demonstrated that the abrupt shift to online learning last semester cost many students half a year of academic progress, with the worst effects on minority and low-income students. That includes many rural areas

like Rim Country and the White Mountains, where half of the families qualify as low-income. An earlier executive order gave school districts broad flexibility in reopening. Districts could return to near-normal, in-person learning, continue mostly online learning or embrace a blend of in-person and online approaches. Districts would still have to offer a place for students to study in the event of a blended approach. However, the order would insulate schools financially from a big drop in enrollment if parents kept their children home. It also eased standards for the amount of time students had to spend in class to get state funding. The latest order spawned new uncertainty just as school districts were scrambling to lay plans for an August 3 reopening, while grappling with the suddenly overwhelming list of scheduling options. Arizona Superintendent of Education Kathie Hoffman this



Metro creative

Research has demonstrated that the abrupt shift to online learning last semester cost many students half a year of academic progress, with the worst effects on minority and low-income students. That includes many rural areas like the White Mountains. week told the Arizona Republic "we were hopeful that schools could reopen and that with mitigation strategies that our schools could still offer in-person instruction. But more recently, it's become more clear that's not advised. We're going to see a lot more online learning than we saw before," she said. The decision comes as confirmed cases of COVID-19 have risen from about 500 per day when the stay-at-home order expired on May 15 to about 3,500 per day in the past week. The rate of infection has increased eight-fold among younger people, but only doubled among high risk groups like those over 65. Only 11 percent of the confirmed cases have been among those under 20. Even before the most recent surge, studies suggested 18 or 20 percent of parents have doubts about sending their children back into in-person classes. On the other hand, many parents support a return to in-person classes, especially those struggling to provide online learning tools at home or facing big problems providing care for children at home due to their own work demands. Interestingly, recent studies suggest COVID-19 doesn't pose a grave risk to children.

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3-day forecast
Today: 89/61. Mostly sunny with winds.
Wednesday: 88/60. Sunny, mostly clear.
Thursday: 88/59. Sunny, partly cloudy with winds.

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