

COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies

Based on advice from Dr. Areola and other medical professionals, there are several effective ways to lessen the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Roeland Park's response to the pandemic has consistently been guided by data and the advice of public health officials. Due to the political landscape, County wide intervention is not likely. Roeland Park can lead effective, evidence-based efforts that can transcend polarizing politics and hopefully set a template for other communities and businesses to replicate. As an alternative to an ordinance, staff proposes the following:

Initiatives:

1. Purchase and provision of KN95 masks

- a. KN95 masks are more effective than surgical and cloth masks, but they are also more expensive. The City could purchase large quantities of these masks to provide both at businesses and to individual residents.

2. Purchase and provision of at-home COVID-19 tests

- a. While anti-gen tests are not quite as effective as PCR tests at detecting an infection, Dr. Areola asserts that the use of antigen tests as part of widespread testing is an effective strategy at containing the spread of the virus. Unfortunately, supply chain issues are making it difficult for individuals to purchase tests. The City could work with other governmental entities to purchase tests and distribute to residents for free.

3. Creation of educational content

- a. Dr. Areola stressed the harm that misinformation is causing and the need for a concerted effort to educate the public. Almost two years into the pandemic, there is surely a sense of public fatigue with COVID-19 information, masks and testing. While there are some minds that are made up, 70% of Johnson County residents eligible for vaccination are vaccinated. In Roeland Park, the majority of citizens support masking and other mitigation efforts. However, it can difficult to wade through conflicting information and discern what advice is sound and based in medical expertise. As we learn more, the information changes. Residents could benefit from a concerted educational campaign highlighting that 1.) you should get boosted no matter what 2.) please wear your mask indoors regardless of vaccination status and 3.) you should test frequently regardless of symptoms and before and after large gatherings. The City could create Facebook posts and email communications to message these points.

Investment: The City could spend up to \$10,000 of ARPA funding to purchase masks and tests. We would continue to monitor the utilization of the masks and tests and could allocate more money as needed. There is currently \$450,000 unencumbered in the ARPA fund, with an additional \$510,000 being allocated in 2022.

Collaboration: These mitigation strategies are most effective when widely adopted. Staff would collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions to coordinate purchases and educational outreach. A collective Northeast Johnson County approach has the potential to reach thousands of people.