



# NEWS RELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 11, 2021

Teresa Anderson,  
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## CENTRAL DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

[Grand Island, Neb. – February 11, 2021]

### CDHD Re-Doubles Efforts in Preparation for New Variant Strains of COVID-19

CDHD failed on a technicality in its request to the Grand Island City Council to extend the mask policy through May 2021. “This will hamper our work in reducing the spread of the new variant strains of the virus that causes COVID-19. When everyone wears a mask, we are all safer,” states Anderson. The new strains are known to be up to 35-45% more easily transmitted from person to person. Additionally, 42% of people who have no symptoms but are positive for COVID-19 carry and can spread the virus.

The Board and staff of CDHD were hopeful that the mask policy would remain in effect through the next three months. “Somehow during the City Council meeting, it was suggested that our boss was DHHS. We want to be clear that in Nebraska, district health departments are independent of state government and that they are governed by local boards. Each board is made up of a combination of city and county elected officials as well as a dentist, a physician, and several public-spirited individuals. We have no outside “supervisor” as was suggested at the meeting. However, according to statute, in order to issue a directed health measure (DHM), a district health department needs the approval from DHHS. Anderson adds, “We checked with the Governor’s office and we cannot get a signature for a local DHM requiring masks due to the Governor’s stand on voluntary masking.”

Legislative Bill 637 introduced at the state level would free local health departments from having to seek state approval for directed health measures or rules and regulations to protect public health. The measure would allow the departments to impose mask mandates and strict limits on social gatherings, among other potential steps. “This bill would allow local measures to be taken depending on local health-related situations,” states Anderson, adding, “What we took from the City Council meeting this past Tuesday is that this would be the Council’s preference.”

CDHD continues to recommend masks as a way to prevent the spread of the virus, along with frequent and thorough hand washing, staying home when ill, avoiding crowds and getting vaccinated when it is your turn.