**FUMC’s Masking and Distancing Requirements, July 30, 2021:**

Since March 2020, we in Fairport have lived in the new world of the Novel Coronavirus and its illness, COVID-19. The virus and its behavior remain novel, with surprising changes, including its ability to not only spread rapidly, but change rapidly. The newer Delta variant, which had overwhelmed India, was found in the U.S. as early as March 2021. We now see Delta spreading rapidly throughout the nation, in NYS, in Monroe County, despite strides made in vaccination. Vaccination remains the most important way to control spread, but other mitigation efforts are also important. That’s why we’ve returned to requiring masks for anyone in the church building.

1. **How does the virus spread?** The virus spreads via aerosols, in respiratory droplets, and can also be transmitted from infected surfaces on which droplets have landed. Concerns at first concentrated on surface cleanliness, but it has become clear that the more significant spread occurs via aerosols, which spread farther and remain in the air, sort of like smoke. Each of us produces aerosols when we breathe and speak, not just from sneezing or coughing (which produce droplets). That is why effective masking, distancing, and ventilation and air filtration have become even more important.
2. **What is different about the Delta variant?** Data show that Delta is significantly more transmissible than any previous COVID variant, spreading as easily as Ebola or chickenpox. (New variants are also being found.) Viral loads found in the nasal and oral passageways of Delta-infected persons are about 1,000 times greater than those seen in previous variants.
3. **I am fully vaccinated: why do I need to wear a mask?** No vaccination is 100% effective; effectiveness varies according to a person’s age and other health issues, and wanes with time (as is true of other vaccines). Fully vaccinated people, while *generally* protected very well from serious illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID, can still become infected. Such infected persons may have only mild illness or even be asymptomatic. The newest data show that vaccinated persons infected with the Delta variant can have as high a viral load as infected unvaccinated persons, capable of spreading the disease, even if they’re asymptomatic. Public health authorities do not now conduct surveillance testing, which could uncover asymptomatic disease. It is therefore safer for each of us to assume that we might be a spreader of a virus that might be deadly to another person. That’s why masking and distancing are important adjuncts to mitigate the spread of COVID.
4. **NYS and Monroe County haven’t instituted a mask mandate: why is FUMC?** The church continues to have a leadership role in the community, grounded in God’s command that we love our neighbor, take stock of their need, and respond. Because Delta is so virulent, CDC’s new guidance states that even vaccinated persons who are more vulnerable to illness should consider wearing a mask no matter the current level of disease transmission in the community. Our neighbors within our worshipping community consist of many who are aged 65 and over:that single factor means that, despite being fully vaccinated, they are less protected than those who are younger. We have members who have other health challenges: they, too, even if vaccinated, are more vulnerable to COVID. Finally, our church family is fortunate to have many younger people, including those who cannot yet be vaccinated. Even if you are hale and hearty as well as vaccinated, if you live with any of the those above, you yourself are more vulnerable and you might inadvertently spread COVID to them.
5. **What’s an effective mask now? One which covers the nose, mouth, and chin, leaving no gaps.** Newer guidance is to wear one of the following, listed from most effective to least:
   1. Most effective: N95 or KN95 (these had been scarce at the start of the pandemic, but are now plentiful)
   2. A blue disposable mask *with* a cloth mask fitting snuggly on top, preferably with a nose wire.
   3. Cloth masks made from at least two layers of tightly woven cloth, preferably with a nose wire (If your glasses fog up, try tightening the nose wire or using a nose clip.)
   4. Blue disposable mask, but with the sides tucked in: see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzTAZDsNBe0>
6. **What about distancing?** We will have every other pew closed to seating as an additional precaution.We urge those who are vaccinated who sit on the street side of the sanctuary to spread out in the pew from those of other households. On the parking lot side of the church, we require that those from different households keep at least 6-feet apart. At this time, we aren’t reinstating pre-registration for worship.
7. **What about outdoors?** If you cannot keep at least 6-feet of distance between yourself and those from other households, it is safest to keep your mask on. If you can keep your distance and if you and others aren’t singing or speaking loudly, then it may be safe to remove your mask.
8. **I’m tired of the pandemic, I’ve been vaccinated, I don’t want to be masked or distanced from my church friends at church. Isn’t it my choice to take a risk?** This continues to be a trying time for everyone. Unlike a personal decision to, say, take a parachute jump, a pandemic puts everyone at risk. The risk isn’t individual, but corporate. Our understandable yearning for a “return to normal”, unless tempered by our foundational call, may make it difficult for us to see how God is calling us to respond now. We’ve prayed, studied, sung, worshipped, been in mission as a community for many years to build up our sensitivity to God’s call and our resilience and responsiveness to it, including in times of crisis. Each of us and all of us have done and can do difficult things. Harnessing the energy underlying our urge to return to a life free of pandemic concerns can undergird us, bolster our hope, keep us in the race. For you, that may mean worshipping on-line. For others, it may mean continuing to worship at church, understanding that part of the armor of God you’ll wear will be a mask showing your love for God’s gift to you of your body and that of your neighbor.

**Sources:**

World Health Organization: [www.who.org](http://www.who.org) (On 6/25/21, WHO urged fully vaccinated people to continue to mask in public because of the Delta variant.)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

General Information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Data tracker: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>

New York State: https://forward.ny.gov/early-warning-monitoring-dashboard

Monroe County: <https://www.monroecounty.gov/health-COVID-19>

Institutional consortiums:

[www.globalepidemics.org](http://www.globalepidemics.org)

[www.covidactnow.org](http://www.covidactnow.org)

News Sources:

New York Times (access is free for Coronavirus news): <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/07/30/world/covid-delta-variant-vaccine?type=styln-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0&action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

Washington Post (access is free for Coronavirus news): <https://www.washingtonpost.com/coronavirus/>

Science Friday: <https://www.sciencefriday.com> (Also available as a podcast. COVID update is usually early in the first hour.)