

Metropolitan Board of Health of Nashville and Davidson County June 26, 2020, Special Called Meeting Minutes

Chair Alex Jahangir called the special called meeting to order at 4:08 p.m. The meeting was held electronically.

A recording of the meeting was posted at <https://www.nashville.gov/Government/Boards-and-Committees/Committee-information/ID/76/Health-Board-of.aspx>.

Present

Alex Jahangir, MD, Chair
Tené H. Franklin, MS, Vice-Chair
Carol Etherington, MSN, RN, Member
Thomas W. Campbell, MD, Member
David Frederick, MS, Member
Michael C. Caldwell, MD, MPH, Director of Health

Dr. Jahangir asked for a motion to allow for electronic meetings for the purpose of conducting emergency and essential business and any rules to the contrary to be suspended.

Ms. Etherington made a motion to allow for electronic meetings for the purpose of conducting emergency and essential business and any rules to the contrary to be suspended. Vice Chair Franklin seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Dr. Jahangir initiated discussion among the Board members and Dr. Caldwell regarding Face Masks in Nashville by reading a statement into the record:

“I’ve called this meeting of the Board of Health to help move our city forward as we fight COVID-19. When this pandemic began, the Board of Health declared a public health emergency authorizing the Director of Health, Dr. Caldwell, to take necessary steps to slow the spread of the virus in our city. Under this declaration, we have limited crowd size at businesses and venues, we have mandated social distancing requirements, set cleaning and sanitation standards for businesses, and required all public-facing employees to wear a face covering. These actions have helped our city move forward as we re-open, and several of our metrics are trending in the right direction. Our city’s testing capacity is double what it needs to be for a city our size, we’ve added more than 120 contact tracing resources to help us identify and track this virus, our hospital capacity is in satisfactory range, and our city’s mortality rate is below that of the state and our nation. However, I think everyone here knows the 14-day rolling average of new cases and our transmission rates are not trending in the way we want it to be. This is a cause of concern and we must do everything that we can as a city to ensure the health and safety of our residents and visitors as we re-open. So today, I am calling on the Board of Health to move to require that the Public Health Department implement a mandatory mask requirement for any person who is out in the public in Nashville and Davidson County. Now, the data is clear: wearing a mask helps reduce the spread of this disease; in a recent study from Health Affairs, it shows that similar mandates in 15 other states and the District of Columbia have prevented up to 450,000 cases in just seven weeks. We’ve also seen other cities like in Montgomery, Alabama, Boston, Memphis, and North Carolina go to similar measures to protect their citizens. Today, we have been encouraging our citizens to wear masks whenever they are out in public. Some have, but I think we’ve seen that most have not. But now is the time to take the next step and require facial coverings for those out in public. We need to take care of each other, and look out for each other, and the best way to do that is to wear a mask. Such safety requirements are not new to society.

Today it is mandatory to wear a seatbelt in cars; it's mandatory to wear a helmet when riding a motorcycle; and it's mandatory to drive a certain speed limit. These measures were put in place to protect ourselves and each other. Wearing a mask does exactly the same thing. So, we are in Phase Three of our re-opening. We want to keep moving forward and not go backwards. As we have just seen today, Texas and Florida regressed in their reopening plans. We don't want that to happen to Nashville and making masks mandatory in Nashville will help us prevent that. I've come to this decision after consulting with experts, leaders in our healthcare system, the Mayor's office, the Metro Council members, all agree that this is the right decision at this time. Those who've expressed their support of this decision include Mayor Cooper, Vice Mayor Shulman, Councilmember Hurt, who chairs the Health Committee, the Council's Minority Caucus, Councilmember Styles, Dr. Hildreth of Meharry, as well as the leaders of Vanderbilt University Medical Center, HCA Tri-Star, St. Thomas, and Nashville General. And so with the Board's approval, I would like the Board to agree that we believe that mandatory face wearing is essential for combatting this pandemic, and as such in my capacity as Chair of the Board of Health, instruct Dr. Caldwell and the Metro Public Health Department, to implement a Public Health Order that will mandate the wearing of a facial covering for anyone out in public in Nashville and Davidson County. Now I know that as experts in the Department work to draft such a resolution, we understand the need to draft this policy with thoughtful consideration. But I believe that our intention and request is clear: Masks save lives, and we need to do all we can to save the lives of Nashvillians, so I ask that we act now."

Dr. Jahangir opened the floor to discussion and invited a motion.

David Frederick made a motion that it be the policy of the Metro Board of Health that we issue a mandatory mask in public order and direct the Director of Health and the staff of the Department to develop such an order and appropriate enforcement policies around that within the next 48 hours and that it be distributed in multiple languages so that we can reach all the public that we need to reach. Dr. Campbell seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Next Regular Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Board of Health is scheduled to be held electronically at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, July 9, 2020, unless social distance restrictions have been rescinded.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:40 p.m.

A. Alex Jahangir, MD, MMHC, FACS
Chair