



Clark County Sheriff's Office

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Chuck E. Atkins, Sheriff

June 24, 2020

As Sheriff, I have been asked what the Clark County Sheriff's Office will do about Governor Inslee's latest proclamation ordering all Washingtonians to wear face masks in public beginning Friday (June 26, 2020). To date, the deputies of the Clark County Sheriff's Office have not cited or arrested anyone violating the governor's previous orders. Instead of enforcement, we have taken a posture of education. This has worked well, and it would seem the Clark County community has been doing well in response to this virus. The hospitals have abundant capacity, and individuals can get tested almost immediately if they suspect they are sick with COVID-19.

However, there seems to be an expectation that law enforcement is the group to enforce social distancing, stay-at-home orders, business restrictions and now wearing a mask in public. We need to move away from our deputies and local law enforcement as the enforcers of the COVID-19 virus guidance. These encounters have the potential to quickly escalate tensions between the police and the public. Forcing my deputies to have oversight and enforcement of mask violations creates an untenable situation.

Governor Inslee himself stated, "We don't want to have enforcement of this. Ideally, there won't be any criminal or civil sanctions for individuals. We just think people will respond, as they had to the first stay home order. There was vast compliance." I agree with the Governor's position on this, that the greatest degree of compliance can be achieved through education and awareness, as opposed to taking enforcement action.

Washington law enforcement agencies continue to focus on education and engagement regarding state orders related to the coronavirus crisis. The statewide face covering order is a public health and safety measure, it is not a mandate for law enforcement to detain, cite or arrest violators but rather an evidence-based and safety focused directive meant to slow the spread of a potentially deadly disease.

I believe that this is primarily a public health matter, not a law enforcement matter. I have tremendous confidence in my deputies as to their judgement and discretion in determining how to best address potential violations of these matters as they are observed. However, as a general matter we do not have the capacity to respond to complaints of "COVID-19 virus" violations, whether they are business violations, social distancing, or mask violations. In extreme instances, deputies can enforce this law through citation or arrest, but I am encouraging them under all circumstances to resolve these matters otherwise. As per the Washington State Coronavirus Response website, if you see someone not wearing a mask – do nothing. "Some people have conditions or circumstances that would make wearing a cloth face covering difficult or dangerous. Just wear your mask and stay six feet away."

There are important resources available to anyone with additional questions regarding COVID-19 or wearing of face coverings and masks. I strongly suggest you avail yourselves of these important community resources:

Clark County Public Health response - <https://www.clark.wa.gov/public-health/novel-coronavirus>

Washington State Department of Health response - <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>

Washington State Coronavirus Response <https://coronavirus.wa.gov/information-for/you-and-your-family/face-masks-or-cloth-face-covering>

www.clark.wa.gov/sheriff

For other formats, contact the Clark County ADA Office 564.397.2322 / 711 or 800.833.6388 / ADA@clark.wa.gov