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# Masks still needed in COVID-19 fight, says Burnet County's top health authority

🕒 4 months ago | [Jennifer Fierro](#)



Burnet County Health Authority Dr. Jules Madrigal was one of the first people in the county to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. She was vaccinated Dec. 23, 2020, at Ascension Seton Highland Lakes in Burnet. Photo courtesy of Ascension Seton



Burnet County Health Authority Dr. Jules Madrigal hates masks, but she also knows from experience that masks work in stopping the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19.

“We’ve seen them (work) in schools,” she said. “We’ve had so little spread in schools, it’s phenomenal. I personally have seen over 200 people with COVID, and I didn’t catch it. Where people aren’t wearing masks, we see spread. I hate (the mask), but I believe in it.”

Madrigal was asked about Gov. Greg Abbott lifting the state’s nine-month-long face covering mandate, which takes effect Wednesday, March 10. The governor is also allowing businesses to open up 100 percent on that date. She pointed out that while the governor has lifted the mask mandate, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Texas Department of State Health Services have not changed their recommendations that people continue to mask up, sanitize, and stay distant. She was direct and to the point about her objective for residents and businesses in the county when it comes to COVID-19.

“My goal is to keep kids in school and workers at work,” said Madrigal, noting area schools are about to be off for Spring Break, which marks the start of the Highland Lakes tourism season. Last year, Spring Break marked the beginning of COVID-19 restrictions, which pretty much put an end to tourism for the year.

As businesses struggled over the past 12 months to continue operating under state-mandated restrictions, Madrigal was tasked with deciding whether to shut down a business completely if an employee contracted the virus.

The decision-making process began with a list of questions for the business owner. Those questions included the business’s mask policy for staff and whether they were able to keep at least 6 feet apart in their workspace.

She pointed to the Burnet Whataburger as an example. The fast-food restaurant had to close in April 2020 after an employee tested positive for the virus. Madrigal discovered through her questions that employees weren’t wearing masks during their shifts. The restaurant was closed so employees could quarantine and the building could receive a deep cleaning.

Other eateries with a positive test did not suffer the same outcome because employees wore masks throughout their shifts, didn’t take breaks together, kept physically distanced, and often washed and sanitized their hands.

Now, with vaccines becoming more prevalent, businesses can feel another level of safety. Once entire staffs are vaccinated, she said the need to shut down a business for safety reasons would probably not happen. Even with variants of the infection appearing in the state, vaccines provide an added safeguard, she said.

“What we’re hoping is to outrun it,” she continued. “I’m hoping we can run, run, run. I’m hoping we can outrun it, and, as cases go down, let’s get rid of those things (masks).”

The pandemic has posed mental challenges as well as physical ones for everyone living under restrictions, Madrigal said. Ten people were admitted to a psychiatric unit because they have been limited in their interactions with loved ones, Madrigal said, again emphasizing the benefits of wearing a mask.

“We must all hang together or we’ll hang separately,” she said. “I think we’ll know a lot more in two weeks. It’s unfortunate timing. We see a spike after a holiday anyway.”

Without a statewide mandate to wear a mask, the choice is left up to the individual and the businesses that interact with customers face to face. Madrigal hopes customers and businesses make the right choice for everyone’s health and safety.

“Have everybody wear them,” she said of the masks.

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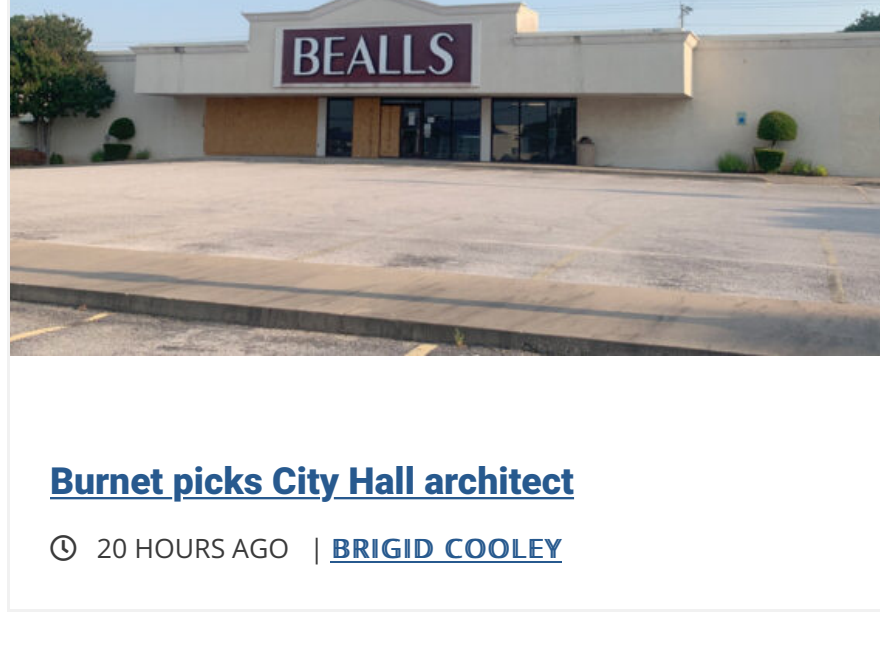
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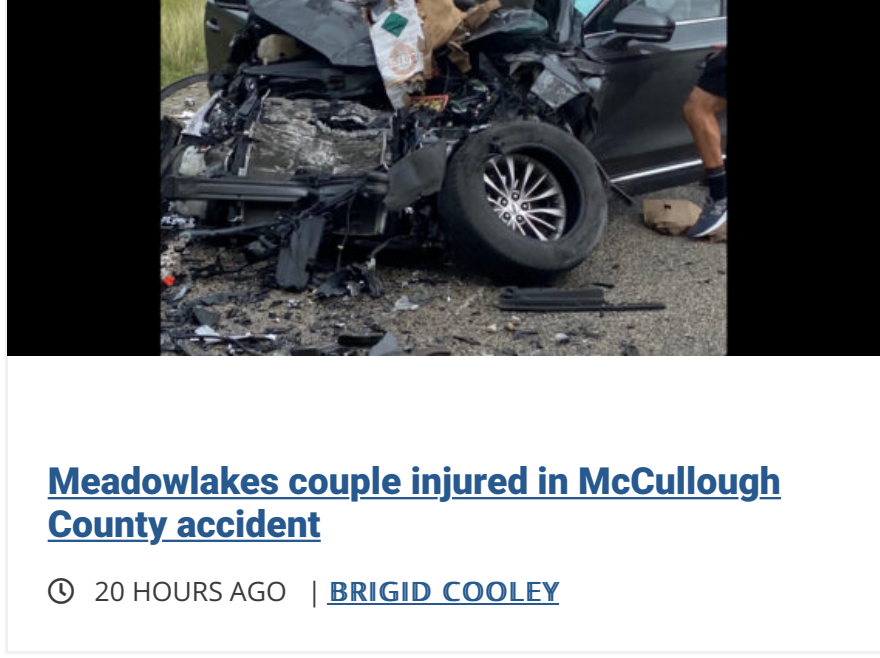
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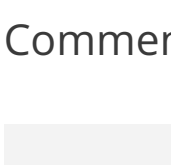
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Scott says:

09/03/2021 at 10:16 pm

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Quit trampling on civil rights.

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