



For the Love of Neighbor Get Vaccinated, Wear a Mask

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The organizers of the U.S. Conference on HIV and AIDS (USCHA) just [announced](#) that due to the surge in the Covid pandemic, this year's conference will be virtual. Their decision was based on two reports, one [from Provincetown, MA](#) revealing that vaccinated people can transmit the Delta variant as easily as those who are not vaccinated and the other, [a study of people living with HIV](#) found that people over 65 have a high risk of death from Covid. Putting the health of the community as their primary concern, they sacrificed the in-person meeting and decided to go virtual.

Making sacrifices for the sake of others is a highly touted character value in our culture. We offer citations, establish holidays, erect monuments, and curate museums to honor our citizens, veterans, public servants, first-line responders, and others who have taken great risks, many of whom have made the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of others. So it is not too great an ask—when the lives of our neighbors are at stake in midst of this still-raging pandemic—to do what may seem inconvenient, uncomfortable, or even risky, to make whatever personal sacrifice may be called for to get vaccinated and wear a mask. The life you save may be your own, but just as important, it may well be another life as well.

The science is clear: the way out of this pandemic is to get vaccinated and wear a mask. I recognize there is a very small number of people who, due to their own health circumstances are not able to take a vaccine. There is also a very small number who, for similar reasons, cannot wear a mask. But for the rest of us, for the love of neighbor: let us put the health of others as our primary concern, get vaccinated, and don our masks.

Some have expressed that vaccinations and masks are a violation of their freedoms, but with freedom comes responsibility. Christianity, as well as other faith traditions, calls on its followers to act for the sake of their neighbor. Jesus commanded to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39), saying that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13). So, while

one may be free not to mask or not to get vaccinated, it is an irresponsible use of that freedom not to take these actions when the lives of others hang in the balance.

Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach, during his speech in the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games Tokyo, remarked how the Olympics brought the world together for the first time since the pandemic began. In all the complexities of the hundreds of events, with the pandemic surging in Tokyo, those who participated in the games found enough solidarity to follow health protocols, including masking and vaccinations. Not only were we inspired by an incredible display of athletic abilities, but we were also inspired by their spirit of determination, cooperation, and hope. "This gives us hope," Bach declared. "This gives us faith in the future."

<https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-president-s-speech-tokyo-2020-closing-ceremony>

Our hope and faith in a future beyond this pandemic lies in a determined, albeit inconvenient solidarity. If for no other reason than our love of neighbor, get vaccinated and wear a mask.



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