

**Governor Bill Lee Remarks as Prepared for Delivery  
Statewide Evening Address  
December 20, 2020, 7 p.m. CDT**

Good evening Tennesseans. It's Christmas week, ordinarily a time when families across the state are gathering to celebrate. Unfortunately, these are not ordinary times. We are in a global pandemic that's been crippling our country for months and now Tennessee is ground zero for a surge in sickness. I am speaking with you tonight because I want to be clear with where we are and what we need to do together to get through this.

We now have around 10,000 Tennesseans getting sick every day. To put that in perspective, that's three times where we were around Halloween. Thousands of our neighbors are in the hospital tonight. More than 100 people are dying each day. We are in a war. With the arrivals of the first vaccine, we have launched an offensive that will end this war. But it is the next few weeks that is going to be the most critical for our state.

We have seen firsthand that Thanksgiving gatherings and extended time indoors have been the principal driver in spreading COVID-19 like wildfire. It only took a matter of days to see gatherings around Thanksgiving translate into a record level of sickness. Tennessee cannot sustain a similar surge after Christmas or New Year's. Tonight, I am asking you to make some hard decisions.

I am asking you to not engage in indoor gatherings for the holidays that include anyone outside your household. Family time and celebrations are important. I understand deeply how much Tennessee families need each other. But we must do all that we can to blunt this surge and keep more Tennesseans from getting sick.

But beyond family gatherings and what I am asking you to do in your own home, we need to address public gatherings through these important weeks, as well.

I am signing an order that will limit indoor public gatherings to 10 people.

I believe high school sports are important for our kids and they should continue. In coordination with the TSSAA, we are limiting attendance at indoor sporting events.

We know that it is gatherings that have caused this surge. That is why we are making these decisions around gatherings that will help us blunt the rise in cases.

Additionally, I am asking business owners to let employees work from home for the next 30 days. If work from home is not available, masks should be worn at work. Plain and simple.

I want to talk about the importance of wearing masks around people who do not live in your home. Right now, 70% of Tennesseans are under a mask requirement. I commend the local officials who have implemented mask requirements. Because of that, 80% of Tennesseans report they wear their masks most or all of the time and I thank them for doing this. We need them to continue and the remaining 20% to wear a mask and protect their health.

Many think a statewide mandate would improve mask wearing, many think it would have the opposite effect. This has been a heavily politicized issue. Please do not get caught up in that and don't misunderstand my belief in local government on this issue. Masks work and I want every Tennessean to wear one.

Tennesseans have two weapons that they must use in the next 30 days: only gather with your household and wear a mask.

The State of Tennessee will continue to mobilize every effective resource in this war. COVID testing is available to everyone free of charge. Vaccines are being delivered to every corner of the state. We are getting hundreds of thousands of vaccines out to our nursing home residents and health care workers so they can be vaccinated.

As our hospitals face this surge of sick Tennesseans, we have authorized the National Guard medics to work in hospitals and provide lifesaving care. We have established COVID specific nursing homes so that we protect the most vulnerable and help hospitals free up critical bedspace. We will continue to utilize every effective resource but government cannot do this alone.

We are in a cold, cruel phase of this pandemic. It will get worse before it gets better. I know you are tired. But we have got to double down. I am reminded of Winston Churchill's words during the darkest days of World War II: "It would be foolish to disguise the gravity of the hour. It would be still more foolish to lose heart and courage."

I believe in the courage of Tennesseans to face this darkest hour. I believe that victory will be ours and we have the power to determine how long this extends. If we each do our part, we will win and move to a new season of health and prosperity for our state.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to each Tennessean for their attention and care tonight. God bless the State of Tennessee.

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