

RETAIL

NRF, absent of White House enthusiasm, calls on US retailers to create nationwide mask policy

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The United States is still facing an uphill battle over the COVID-19 coronavirus as cases pile up, many of them due to inadequate social distancing and refusal to wear face masks. This has turned a health issue into an ideological tussle, forcing the National Retail Association and its ilk to step in where the federal government will not. Image credit: National Retail Federation

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

The National Retail Federation has asked all retailers in the United States to adopt a nationwide policy that requires customers to wear face coverings or masks to protect the health and well-being of shoppers, store employees and partner vendors.

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The statement from the Washington-based retail lobby comes amidst a fierce national debate over face masks as the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreaks rages on across the South and Western U.S. President Trump and several of his administration members refuse to wear masks or even encourage the practice, leaving retailers and marketers to deal with the issue.

"The health and safety of associates and customers is retailers' number one priority and wearing a face covering or mask is scientifically proven to reduce the spread of COVID-19," NRF said in the statement.

"NRF applauds the leadership of companies like Walmart, Starbucks, Best Buy, BJ's Wholesale Club, Apple, Qurate Retail Group, Costco and others that have implemented nationwide mask mandates.

"We hope today's announcement by Walmart the world's largest retailer that it will be enforcing a policy requiring customers to wear a mask to shop in their stores is a tipping point in this public health debate.

"Workers serving customers should not have to make a critical decision as to whether they should risk exposure to infection or lose their jobs because a minority of people refuse to wear masks in order to help stop the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

"Since the onset of the pandemic, retailers of all sizes have been on the front lines safely serving customers and supporting their communities.

"Stores are private businesses that can adopt policies permitted by law for the health and safety of their associates and their customers.

"Shopping in a store is a privilege, not a right. If a customer refuses to adhere to store policies, they are putting employees and other customers at undue risk.

"As noted in a [letter](#) we co-signed with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Business Roundtable and other industry groups that was sent to President Trump, Vice President Pence and governors across the country two weeks ago, it is critically important that we have a national mask standard implemented locally.

"Retailers are protecting the health and safety of communities they serve. Our elected leaders need to set politics aside and follow their example."

The letter cited in the [NRF](#) statement was quite categorical in its support for face masks in retail establishments.

Time for national mask standard

Sent July 2, here is what the letter sent to President Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, Maryland Governor Lawrence J. Hogan Jr. and New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo (chair and vice chair of the National Governors Association, respectively) said:

"Dear President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Governors Hogan and Cuomo,

"The medical evidence is clear: the wearing of masks or face coverings in public settings, especially when it is not possible to consistently maintain social distancing, is a critical element to preventing the spread of COVID-19. Regrettably, in recent weeks we have seen evidence that in some areas where there is growing community spread, issuing voluntary guidance on masks is insufficient to protect public health. Absent stronger measures to prevent transmission, communities across America risk another round of shutdowns, broad restrictions on non-essential activities, and irreparable economic harm.

"Current local and state mandatory mask requirements vary widely in scope, application, and enforcement. For example, there is variation on whether the mandate applies to all businesses, to just employees or also customers, and exemptions for age or other health conditions (e.g. asthma). In addition, in some locations the mandate is imposed on businesses for them to enforce. Not only has this led to public confusion and lower levels of consumer confidence, but it has also contributed to confrontations between customers and employees and litigation from both directions enforcing mask requirements and failing to enforce mask requirements.

"For the sake of public health and our economy, we request that the White House Coronavirus Task Force and the National Governors Association work together to:

1. Establish guidance on the appropriate metrics (e.g. positive tests, hospitalizations) for imposing location-based mandatory mask requirements in all public spaces;
2. Develop model mandatory mask policies that are simple and do not impose the enforcement burden on organizations without such expertise, such as businesses and non-profits; and
3. Make clear that businesses and non-profits will not be held liable for refusing entry or services to an individual who is not complying with face covering requirements.

"To be clear, the decision to impose face covering requirements should remain at the state or local level but be informed by clear and consistent guidance based on data. We believe that a national mask standard, implemented locally, offers the surest way to protect public health and promote economic recovery.

"Across the country, the business community is stepping up to not only manufacture masks, but also to distribute them free of charge, and to promote the wearing of face coverings. We stand ready to continue to work in partnership with government at all levels to combat this pandemic and support our economy."