



July 16, 2020

To: Distribution

From: Pandemic Working Group

Re: **COVID-19: Prisons ~ Masks & CO2 ~ Retail Beat ~ Tight Quarters**

COVID in Prisons. As reported by Associated Press, prisons have been breeding grounds for the coronavirus in the US with about 57,000 prisoners having tested positive, of which nearly 700 have died. The statistics in California are especially disconcerting. As reported in the LATimes, two-thirds of the inmates at the federal prison on Terminal Island were infected in early May, and nearly 70% of the incarcerated in Lompoc federal prison tested positive. Further, the mode of the spread has not always been within the same facility. For example, after 600 inmates tested positive in a facility in Chino, California, many were transferred to other prisons, such as San



Quentin (pictured here from NationSwell behind the guard wearing the obligatory mirrored sunglasses), which, since then, has had nearly 2,000 cases and 11 deaths.

Interestingly, between March and June, nearly 100,000 inmates have been released from prisons throughout the US (ranging from 2% in Virginia to 32% in Rhode Island). However, according to AP and the Marshall Project, the drop is not from releasing inmates to enhance social distancing; rather, many prisons have stopped accepting prisoners from county jails to avoid importing the virus, court closures have reduced sentencing activity, and parole officers are decreasingly recommending jail-time for persons with low-level violations. Within California, to date, the prison departure date for about 3,500 prisoners has been moved forward in an attempt to decrease population density in subject facilities. However, this is a difficult issue, as public officials are now being forced to balance inmate health within full facilities against public safety.

Masks and CO2. Skeptics abound – even within the realm of face coverings. You may have heard some say that, by wearing a face covering, we are breathing in our own carbon dioxide which could have adverse health impacts. As reported by Marshall Shepherd in Forbes, however, this fear is unfounded. To the notion that wearing a mask causes either hypoxia (insufficient oxygen supply in tissue), hypoxemia (reduced oxygen intake) or hypercapnia (carbon dioxide toxicity), OSF Healthcare pulmonologist Dr. Michael Peil (like the CDC) says that dangerous levels of carbon dioxide build-up with a mask is unlikely, as “The carbon dioxide is going to pass right through the face mask, we are going to inhale fresh air through that, so there is really no

opportunity for carbon dioxide to build up unnaturally.” Think of it as a kind of air exchange – good air for bad. Also, Dr. Peil notes that carbon dioxide does not cling to face coverings. CDC does state that face coverings should not be worn by children aged-two or under, or by persons who have trouble breathing, are incapacitated or are unable to remove a mask without assistance. With that limited caveat, however, CDC finds that cloth face coverings are most likely to limit the spread of COVID-19 when they are used widely by people in public settings.

The Retail Beat. On a related note, as reported by USAToday, after Costco and Apple adopted nationwide mask policies for their stores, retail giants Walmart, Target, CVS, Walgreens and Kroger are following suit with announcements to implement similar policies even within states that have no such requirement. You may have read (in TheHill.com) of the man in Louisiana who was arrested earlier today for trying to run his car over a police officer after being ordered to put on a mask inside a Walmart; this was not due to the Walmart policy (which has yet to be implemented) but, rather, to Louisiana’s statewide mask order relating to public places. As of today, 40 states have issued such mask orders, with Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado and, at least in part, Ohio, having just joined the fray. Interestingly, Georgia has just gone the other direction with Governor Brian Kemp’s recent suspension of local, mandatory mask orders. Under Kemp’s order, cities and counties are not permitted to have restrictions stricter than his, and, at this stage, the state’s orders are only recommendations. This just in - as reported 32 minutes ago on NPR.com, Governor Kemp has just filed a lawsuit against Atlanta Mayor Keisha Bottoms for leaving in place the citywide, mandatory mask order. So, the saga continues in the Peach State.

Standing Room Only. MSNNews reports that a public meeting before the Utah County commissioners on the subject of mask requirements for schoolchildren had to be hurriedly adjourned when over 100 people – mostly unmasked – packed the room. To his credit, upon seeing the assembly, commissioner Tanner Ainge declaimed from the dais, “This is the exact opposite of what we should be doing. We’re supposed to be physically distancing, wearing masks.” Over the audience’s boos, Ainge shouted, “This gathering violates current health recommendations.” This is a photo of the proceedings – not an exemplary gathering from a public health point of view. If you should find yourself in this kind of setting – whatever the subject of discussion – please extract yourself.



If you have any questions or comments on this advisory, please contact either kellyw@amvac.com or timd@amvac.com.