

Reasons for the Loss of Public Trust in DHEC and Suggested Solutions

- ✓ South Carolina law (44-1-80, 44-1-110) charges the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) with being the sole advisor to protect South Carolinian's public health.

"The Department of Health and Environmental Control is invested with all the rights and charged with all the duties pertaining to organizations of like character and is the sole advisor of the State in all questions involving the protection of the public health within its limits."

- ✓ There has been a distinct, growing mistrust of DHEC and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in our state. This is in part due to DHEC staff appearing to adopt and encourage certain CDC recommendations without extensive scientific review which are:
 1. not supported by the body of scientific evidence
 2. not adapted as emerging scientific evidence and new information becomes available
 3. not scientifically justified to be implemented in all age groups and population
 4. detrimental due to known and unintended negative consequences in certain populations, resulting in other very serious public health problems
- ✓ South Carolinians' concerns regarding DHEC management of the COVID-19 crisis are supported by:
 - documented written correspondence with qualified DHEC staff
 - documented FOIA request responses from qualified DHEC staff
 - the known deleterious damage from DHEC COVID-19 Guidance in South Carolina

Specific concerns include the following:

1. DHEC staff are unable to provide transparency on the data criteria used to collect South Carolinian COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths published on the DHEC website. Subsequently, it is indistinguishable if COVID-19 disease directly caused, contributed to, or was not related to a reported South Carolinian COVID-19 hospitalization or death.

South Carolinians expect scientifically accurate data collection and transparency on how our state's COVID-19 complications are being reported. It is essential for providers, parents, and the public at-large to understand the circumstances in different populations impacted so individual risk may be properly assessed. South Carolina businesses, institutions and elected officials, such as School Board Members, depend heavily on an objective disclosure of the data from DHEC so they may craft appropriate and proportional public health policies.

2. DHEC staff have not provided adequate scientific evidence, data and source documents to support the strong recommendation of universal masking in South Carolina's K-12 schools. Additionally, DHEC staff did not perform an adequate ongoing risk vs benefit analysis of this policy for school-age children. DHEC staff also rejected concerns in writing that universal masking in schools may have unintended harmful impacts on children.

Conversely, a large body of scientific evidence suggests masking is not an effective public health measure in schools and that masking policies in schools carry deleterious impacts. South Carolina and nation-wide data suggest children have experienced significant learning loss, developmental delays and more as a result of universal masking policies.

3. DHEC staff reported that they are unable to provide scientific evidence, data, and source documents supporting the safety and effectiveness of DHEC's recommendation of universal pediatric COVID-19 vaccination. Additionally, DHEC did not perform a risk vs benefit analysis for universal COVID-19 vaccination of South Carolina infants and children age 6 months-age 4, age 5-11 and age 12-18 years old.

Yet DHEC staff continues to message South Carolina's parents, schools and media outlets that COVID-19 vaccination is safe and effective and the best opportunity for keeping our children safe and healthy from COVID-19 disease.

4. DHEC staff reported that they did not perform an inquiry with the CDC or an investigation of the nearly 9,000 COVID-19 vaccine adverse events South Carolinians reported to the Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS). DHEC continues to recommend the universal vaccination of South Carolinians age 6 months and older, yet has not investigated possible unintended negative health events that DHEC's COVID-19 vaccination program is having on individual South Carolinians in our state.

Further supporting the essential need for DHEC's scientific review of COVID-19 vaccine safety is that based on DHEC's vaccine messaging, many South Carolinians are being required to or voluntarily accept COVID-19 vaccinations as a condition of their employer or educational institution. Adding further complexity is DHEC staff providing these recommendations cannot be held legally or personally accountable if injury or death results from the recommendation of universal COVID-19 vaccinations. This reality places the physical and legal burden of risk squarely on South Carolinians.

This is not good enough.

South Carolinians expect excellence from DHEC - the primary source of public health guidance in our state.

To rebuild trust in DHEC and public health guidance:

- **An inquiry by those who are charged with oversight of DHEC into these concerns (the DHEC Board and South Carolina Legislative Oversight Committees) is urgently needed.** These inquiries will provide South Carolinians further transparency of how DHEC staff created or adopted certain COVID-19 public health strategies, collected and reported data, and messaged certain COVID-19 information to citizens.

The DHEC Board members and Legislative Oversight Committee members will then have the ability to make thoughtful recommendations and implement effective actions to repair DHEC and strengthen our state.

- **South Carolinians will expect to have bright, trustworthy, qualified DHEC staff that work strictly for the best interest of South Carolinians (not the CDC, medical societies and beyond).** Those charged with the critical task of creating necessary public health policy for our state will be expected to thoughtfully, independently, and rigorously review data and scientific evidence before crafting public health policies.
- **South Carolinians will expect DHEC staff to consistently document on the DHEC website transparent, accurate data and sound citations supporting public health recommendations.** DHEC's communication and guidance to South Carolinians must be transparent and based on an independent, thoughtful review of data and evidence.