

Papers of Mayor James Rolph

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50-1  
October 23, 1918.

To the  
Honorable Board of Supervisors  
of the City and County of San Francisco:

Gentlemen:

Because the life of every human being in San Francisco is menaced by the epidemic of influenza which up to last night had claimed 232 lives since October first, and because every possible means must be used to check the spread of this disease, I have called you in special session for the purpose of enacting an ordinance proposed by the Board of Public Health.

From the inception of the epidemic, the Board of Health, its Health Officer, Dr. W.C. Hassler, and each of its employees, has given devoted service along two equally important lines, the care of those already afflicted, and the application of preventive measures to safeguard those not yet sick.

With all obtainable evidence in hand as to the course of epidemics of this disease in other cities, and after taking advice of medical men competent to give weighty opinions, the Board of Health, on Monday evening, October 21st, strongly advised the universal wearing of gauze masks covering the nose and mouth, as a measure for the protection of the whole public and every member of the population.

Pursuant to the recommendation of the Board of Public Health, I at that time issued a public proclamation, as follows:

"TO THE PEOPLE OF SAN FRANCISCO:

"You are face to face with a deadly epidemic.

"Already it has begun to make its record of death in our city.

"It must be stopped! It is the duty of every person to help stop it.

"The Board of Public Health has left no stone unturned to find the best means of fighting the growing death lists.

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"Its word to the public is 'WEAR MASKS.'

"As Mayor, I request every man, woman and child in San Francisco to take this advice of the health authorities.

"Wear these masks and save your lives and those of your children and your neighbors.

"The Italian Supreme Command has printed on every gas mask, 'Who leaves this mask behind, dies.' You run that chance if you fail your city now and do not wear a mask.

"Masks may prevent half of more of the sickness and death with which we are confronted. Every mask will cut down our possible total of 50,000 cases and 1,500 deaths.

"This proclamation has the concurrence of the Board of Public Health, the Red Cross, the State Council of Defense, Organized Labor, Organized Associations of Merchants, charitable organizations and other public bodies.

"Conscience, patriotism and self-protection demand immediate and rigid compliance."

On Tuesday, October 22nd, Rear Admiral J.L. Jayne, Commandant of the Twelfth Naval District, called upon me, and, in a spirit of most admirable cooperation with the City's efforts to check the epidemic, issued an order that all personnel of the Twelfth Naval District wear masks in accordance with the proclamation above quoted.

Similar action was promptly taken by Brigadier <sup>General</sup> J.F. Morrison, whose cooperation is to be counted upon throughout this emergency.

In response, a large percentage of the civil population at once began the wearing of masks. Soldiers and Sailors are wearing them in accordance with orders of their Commanders and for their own protection and the safety of others.

It must be noted, with regret, that there are some among the civil population, who, through failure to realize the seriousness of the menacing disease, or possibly through captiousness or disregard of the public health, have not complied with the often published directions of the health authorities.

Conditions in San Francisco at this time admit of no trifling or delays in the application of either preventive measures or means of treatment.

If our Soldiers and Sailors, and practically the whole civil population are in masks, the emergency demands action upon the part of the city authorities to compel those who have not voluntarily complied with this regulation to do so at once.

Following a conference with the health authorities,

Hon. Board of Supervisors,---3.

October 23, 1918.

I called you together in this special session, and respectfully request you, upon the grounds above stated, to initiate an ordinance at this time calling for the wearing of masks by all persons in this city.

For your information I beg to add that every possible means known to the authorities is being used in an endeavor to check the spread of this epidemic of influenza, and to save the lives of those already stricken. I know that you will cooperate in every way that you can in this situation and have informed the health authorities that the City Government will go to the limit of its means to do all that is necessary to safeguard the public.

Respectfully,

(SGD) JAMES ROLPH, JR.

Mayer.

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