For immediate release

Safer Voting – Slow the Spread

N95DECON, a nonpartisan consortium of scientists from 15+ universities across the nation, suggests five steps to help you stay healthy when voting in person. To further minimize COVID exposure, consider voting by mail or dropping your ballot off at a drop box.

“Millions of Americans will be voting in the next few weeks and these steps can help ensure they remain safe,” said Ashley Styczynski, M.D., a member of the consortium and former CDC Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer.

Five specific steps can reduce the risk of catching and spreading COVID-19.

1. **Wear a mask.** Masks have the biggest benefit when you encounter people you don’t know for any extended period of time. This may occur during in person voting on election day. Even if you don’t normally wear a mask, wearing one while waiting in line will reduce your risk. An N95 respirator provides the best protection, so election day would be a good day to wear an N95 if you have one without an exhalation valve. Otherwise, a medical mask or cloth mask is still much better than nothing.

2. **Open the windows if you are sharing a ride to the polls.** Our analysis shows that sharing a vehicle with an infected stranger for 15 minutes may create a high risk of infection. Rolling down the windows improves fresh air circulation and can reduce this risk. If your only option is to share a ride or take public transportation, seek as much fresh airflow as possible, even if it means wearing a hat and jacket.

3. **Waiting in line? Bigger spaces are better, and outside is best.** Once you get to your polling place, waiting in line is likely to be the most risky activity you will face. How and where you wait in line can make a big difference. All things being equal, waiting in line outdoors is much less risky than waiting in a narrow hallway. Big auditoriums and stadiums are also much better than small spaces. If you’re worried about having to wait in line in a small space, call your election department and see if they are providing any safer options.

4. **Keep your distance.** While standing in line and waiting to vote, try to maintain a minimum of six feet between you and others. Staying six feet away reduces your risk of exposure.

5. **Sanitize your hands before and after you vote.** Avoid touching your face, and be sure to sanitize your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or wash with soap and water before going about your day.

“We analyzed every step of election day to determine the relative risk of each activity. The results were surprising,” said Dr. Walter Schneider, professor and senior scientist at the University of Pittsburgh Learning Research and Development Center. “The highest-risk activities are those which confine people to small spaces such as a car, bus, or small hallway. Poll
organizers can prevent these risky situations by maximizing ventilation, bringing lines outside, or using a ticketing system to reduce indoor lines.”

N95DECON is a 501(c)(3) non-profit providing data-driven guidance on ways to reduce transmission during the COVID-19 pandemic. N95DECON is currently developing materials for poll organizers and poll workers to help make voting safer, which will be available at www.n95decon.org/vote. For more information on mask use by the public, visit www.n95decon.org.

For more information contact:  media@n95decon.org

N95DECON team members available for interview:

- Walter Schneider, Professor and Senior Scientist at the Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh, wws@pitt.edu
- Ashley Styczynski, M.D., Postdoctoral Medical Fellow, Infectious Diseases Fellow in Medicine, Stanford University, former CDC Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer, astyczyn@stanford.edu
- Chris Chidsey, Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry, Stanford University, chidsey@stanford.edu
- Nichole Starr, M.D. and MPH, General Surgery resident physician, UCSF. Senior Research Fellow, Lifebox Foundation, Fogarty International Fellow, NIH. Nichole.Starr@ucsf.edu
- Tyler Chen, PhD Student and Knight-Hennessy Scholar, Bioengineering, Stanford University, tyler.chen@stanford.edu