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IOWA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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The Honorable Zach Wahls  
201 E 9th St., #415  
Coralville, IA 52241  
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Dear Senator Wahls:

You contacted the Iowa Attorney General's Office regarding the power of cities or counties to pass local regulations requiring patrons of business to wear masks. A similar question was answered by this office in a question from city officials in March of this year regarding the power of local officials to issue shelter in place orders. I have attached a copy of that analysis to this correspondence for your review.

In this previous analysis, we determined that while the Statewide Disaster Emergency Proclamations are in place, the Governor retains the power to delegate, sub-delegate, or retain the administrative authority under Iowa Code Chapter 28C (Emergency Management) to issue directives of this nature. *Please see* Iowa Code Section 28C.6(8) (enclosed). Iowa Code Section 135.144(3) and (9) (enclosed) empowers the Iowa Department of Public Health, in conjunction with the Governor, to take reasonable measures as necessary to prevent the transmission of infectious disease, to inform the public when a public health disaster has been declared or terminated, and to inform the public of the protective measures to take during the disaster.

The Governor has addressed usage of personal protective equipment (PPE) in prior proclamations, including the proclamations of 5/25/2020 and 6/10/2020, which are still applicable and which provide that in re-opening of public use facilities and businesses that proprietors must adhere to hygiene practices and public health measures consistent with guidance issued by the Iowa Department of Public Health. Any local action or regulation would need to be consistent and compliant with the Governor's Proclamations and the Iowa Department of Public Health Directives in scope and remedies while the Governor's Emergency Proclamations are in place.

Finally, local regulation of this nature, if not preempted under the current Emergency Disaster Proclamations, would likely be under the jurisdiction of local boards of health under their power under Iowa Code Section 137.104(1)(b) (enclosed) to, "make and enforce such reasonable rules and regulations, not inconsistent with law and the rules of the state board, as may be necessary for the protection and improvement of the public health."

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I hope you find this helpful in answering this question. Please be advised this contains the results of my research and analysis on your question but is not an official opinion of the Iowa Attorney General's Office.

Best regards,

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PATC Division  
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### Cited Authorities

#### Iowa Code 29C.6(8)

##### **29C.6 Proclamation of disaster emergency by governor.**

In exercising the governor's powers and duties under this chapter and to effect the policy and purpose, the governor may:

8. Delegate any administrative authority vested in the governor under this chapter and provide for the subdelegation of any such authority.

#### Iowa Code 135.144(3)&(9)

##### **135.144 Additional duties of the department related to a public health disaster**

3. Take reasonable measures as necessary to prevent the transmission of infectious disease and to ensure that all cases of communicable disease are properly identified, controlled, and treated.
9. Inform the public when a public health disaster has been declared or terminated, about protective measures to take during the disaster, and about actions being taken to control the disaster.

#### Iowa Code 137.104(1)(b)

##### **137.104 Local boards of health — powers and duties**

1. A local board of health shall:
  - b. Make and enforce such reasonable rules and regulations not inconsistent with law and the rules of the state board as may be necessary for the protection and improvement of the public health.

# Legal Memo from the Attorney General's Office

## **County and City Home Rules Powers:**

Article III, Section 38A and Section 39A contain the City and County Home Rule provisions in the Iowa Constitution. The powers granted cities and counties under these constitutional amendments are to determine their local affairs and government, not inconsistent with the laws of the General Assembly, except that they shall not have power to levy any tax unless expressly authorized by the general assembly. Counties are also constrained in their home rule powers if that power conflicts with the power of a city, providing a city power will prevail within its jurisdiction.

When an ordinance prohibits an act permitted by a statute, or permits an act prohibited by a statute, the ordinance is considered inconsistent with state law and is preempted. See City of Des Moines v. Gruen, 457 N.W.2d 340, 342 (Iowa 1990). Implied preemption occurs when the legislature has covered a subject by statutes in such a manner as to demonstrate a legislative intention that the field shall be preempted by state law.

The powers exercised by cities under the Home Rule Amendments have been generally categorized as "police powers". These include the power of cities and counties to protect rights, privileges, and property of the city and county and to preserve and improve the peace, safety, welfare, comfort and convenience of their residents. Iowa Code Section 331.301 (county) and Iowa Code Section 364.1 (City). These powers may be exercised by cities and counties subject to limitations expressly imposed by a state law, and are barred if such actions are irreconcilable with state law. Under Iowa Code Sections 331.301 and 364.3, City mayors are further empowered to govern the city by proclamation during a time of emergency or public danger. Iowa Code Section 372.14.

These authorities generally indicate authority for cities and counties to act to protect the safety of the residents of their communities yet require cities and counties to yield where the powers are inconsistent with powers of the state.

## **State Powers**

A public health disaster is defined in Iowa law as a state of disaster emergency proclaimed by the Governor in consultation with the Department of Public Health for a disaster that involves an imminent threat of a health condition caused by the appearance of a novel infectious agent and that poses a high probability of a large number of serious health consequences. Iowa Code § 135.140(6). During a public health disaster, the Governor and the Department of Public Health have broad legal authority to take all reasonable measures necessary to prevent the transmission of the virus and to prevent, control, and treat the infectious disease. These legal authorities are contained in part at Iowa Code sections 135.144 and 29C.6. These authorities include the powers

to “control ingress and egress to and from a disaster area, the movement of persons within the area, and the occupancy of premises in such area.” Iowa Code § 29C.6(15).

Iowa Code Section 29C.6 (8) allows the Governor to delegate and sub-delegate any administrative authority under the Emergency Management Chapter. This indicates the Governor may delegate powers under emergency powers under that section to local authorities to address the current public health emergency, including the power to place restrictions on movement within the communities. This likewise indicates the Governor may choose not to delegate this authority to local agencies.

**Conclusion:** While cities and counties have police powers to protect the health and safety of their citizens, the State has the authority to declare and coordinate the response to a public health disaster. This includes the power of the Governor to sub-delegate administrative authority to cities and counties, including the power to restrict movement within communities by these local authorities. This power also would allow the Governor discretion to retain such powers and not delegate this authority to cities or counties.