

OCLA letter: Mandatory face mask policies have no scientific basis, violate civil liberties, and must be rejected

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Subject: RE: OCLA letter: Mandatory face mask policies have no scientific basis, violate civil liberties, and must be rejected
Date: Thursday, July 23, 2020 7:20 AM
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This is to confirm that your email has been received by Ottawa Public Health (OPH).

Please be assured that your concerns have been heard regarding the temporary mandatory mask by-law that OPH recommended and that Ottawa City Council enacted on July 15, 2020.

As explained in the [report to Council](#), as more businesses and public spaces open and people increase their contacts, the risk of a rapid rise in infections and outbreaks is ever-present. Increasing evidence supports wearing a mask when in enclosed public spaces as an important measure in reducing COVID-19 transmission, while the risk of rising rates of infection continues. The scientific community and public health organizations around the world have concluded that the cumulative weight of evidence supports that face masks lessen the rates of transmission of COVID-19 from wearers. Most agree that face masks work best by reducing the amount of virus that is projected into the air in respiratory micro-droplets from someone who is infected with the virus. Additionally, other community level measures such as physical distancing and hand hygiene should continue to be employed to decrease transmission of COVID-19.

Should you be interested in reviewing some of the emerging evidence on mask use to reduce the spread of COVID-19, please refer to resources from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) as well as the [World Health Organization \(WHO\) Updated Guidance dated July 9, 2020](#), an excerpt of which is copied below:

Given that infected people without symptoms can transmit the virus, it is also prudent to encourage the use of fabric face masks in public places where there is community transmission. Fabric masks, if made and worn properly, can serve as a barrier to droplets expelled from the wearer into the air and environment and where other prevention measures, such as physical distancing, are not possible.

You can also visit [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Masks](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/masks), which has been updated to provide additional information and guidance on the use of cloth masks and face coverings, including information on who should wear masks and when, how to correctly use them, how to make them, where to acquire them, as well as a host of Frequently Asked Questions about this new directive. The website also now includes the following links, which provide additional information in support of mask use in public spaces:

- Public Health Ontario: [COVID-19 – What We Know So Far About...Wearing Masks in Public](#)
- [Ontario Ministry of Health](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](#)

With respect to potential harms / disadvantages of wearing masks, the [WHO](#) outlines the potential benefits/advantages and the potential harms/disadvantages of mask use by the general public through available evidence. WHO has updated its guidance to advise that to prevent COVID-19 transmission effectively in areas with community transmission, governments should encourage the general public to wear masks in specific situations and settings as part of a comprehensive approach to suppress SARS-CoV-2 transmission (please refer to [Advice on the use of masks: Interim guidance](#), Table 2).

Benefits and advantages of mask-use in the general public include:

- Reduced risk of exposure to secretions from infected persons before they develop symptoms (source control);
- Reduced potential stigmatization of individuals wearing masks to prevent infecting others or of people caring for COVID-19 patients in non-clinical settings;
- Enabling people to feel they can contribute to decreasing the spread of the virus;
- Serving as a reminder to comply with other measures (e.g., hand hygiene, avoid touching the nose and mouth); of note, this can also have the reverse effect (see disadvantages below).

Potential harms and disadvantages of mask-use in the general public include:

- Potential increased risk of self-contamination due to improper use (e.g. the manipulation of a face mask and subsequently touching eyes with contaminated hands, continuing to wear a soiled mask);
- Potential for discomfort, headache and/or breathing difficulties, depending on the type of mask used (note that recent data indicate that two non-woven spunbond layers offer both adequate filtration and breathability);
- Potential development of facial skin lesions, irritant dermatitis or worsening acne, when used frequently for long periods;
- Difficulty with communicating (e.g. unclear speech, impairment of lip-reading);
- Provision of a false sense of security, leading to potentially lower adherence to other critical preventive measures such as physical distancing and hand hygiene;
- Waste management issues, such as improper mask disposal leading to increased litter in public places;
- Difficulty with proper wear/use, especially among children, people who are cognitively impaired, those with mental illness, those with asthma or chronic respiratory or breathing problems, and those who have had facial trauma or recent surgery.

(References: World Health Organization, 5 June 2020, Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19; and Al Badri F. Surgical mask contact dermatitis and epidemiology of contact dermatitis in healthcare workers. Current Allergy & Clinical Immunology, 30,3: 183 - 188. 2017)

It's important to note that some of these potential harms are mitigated through the exemptions included in the Temporary Mandatory Mask By-law and/or through OPH's guidance and education on proper mask use.

Lastly, I can advise that in addition to monitoring the local situation closely and seeking to learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions, OPH also continues to monitor emerging evidence on mask use and mask-use guidance. Should relevant guidance change, OPH will issue an update.

While we respect that you may not necessarily agree with this public health initiative, we trust that you will understand the basis that prompted OPH to recommend that Council enact such a by-law.

Yours truly,

Diane Blais

Ottawa Public Health | Santé publique Ottawa

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From: Joseph Hickey | OCLA <joseph.hickey@ocla.ca>

Sent: June 29, 2020 10:31 PM

To: Etches, Vera <Vera.Etches@ottawa.ca>; healthsante <healthsante@ottawa.ca>; Watson, Jim (Mayor/Maire) <Jim.Watson@ottawa.ca>

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Subject: OCLA letter: Mandatory face mask policies have no scientific basis, violate civil liberties, and must be rejected

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Ontario
Civil Liberties
Association

Dear Dr. Etches, Mayor Watson, and Members of Ottawa City Council,

Please find attached a letter from the Ontario Civil Liberties Association (OCLA) re: "Mandatory face mask policies have no scientific basis, violate civil liberties, and must be rejected".

Please provide us with your responses so that we can inform our members and the public.

Yours truly,

Joseph Hickey, PhD
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