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**REPORT TITLE: Use of Non-Medical Masks and Face Coverings in Enclosed Public Spaces**

**FROM: Cathy Granger, Acting Commissioner of Health Services  
Lawrence C. Loh, MD MPH FCFP FRCPC FACPM, Medical Officer of Health**

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That enactment of temporary municipal by-laws by the City of Brampton, City of Mississauga and Town of Caledon, to require non-medical masks/face coverings in enclosed public spaces, in accordance with the advice of the Region of Peel Medical Officer of Health, be endorsed;**

**And further, that the Region of Peel Medical Officer of Health continue to direct public health efforts that encourage community compliance with the wearing of a mask/face covering in the manner and to the extent provided for under such by-laws;**

**And further, that the Province be requested to adopt a complementary mask regulation applicable to enclosed public spaces under provincial jurisdiction within the Region of Peel, including all public transit systems operated privately or by provincial agencies;**

**And further, that the Government of Canada be requested to adopt complementary mask requirements applicable to enclosed public spaces under federal jurisdiction within the Region of Peel;**

**And further, that an education campaign to inform business owners/operators and Peel residents of the new mask/face covering requirements, be implemented in coordination with the local municipalities.**

## **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- While COVID-19 cases in Peel are on a decline, the virus continues to circulate in our community and vigilance is critical to minimizing community spread and mitigating transmission risk.
- Since the peak of the outbreak in April, Peel Public Health has indicated the need to control the virus in our community through the practice of four core behaviours: physical distancing, masking, hand hygiene, and self-isolating and testing if you think you may have a COVID-19 infection.
- Evidence continues to suggest that non-medical mask use by the public may reduce the spread of COVID-19 in a form of source control, that is, protecting others from the wearer if they are infectious.
- Together with federal and provincial agencies, Peel Public Health has strongly recommended the use of non-medical masks where physical distancing is not possible.

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- As we move to re-open our community, physical distancing will become more challenging which means the use of non-medical masks/face coverings becomes more important in keeping the spread of COVID-19 under control.
  - Mandating the use of non-medical masks/face coverings in enclosed public spaces would serve to reinforce this recommendation and promote its consistent application in the community, together with the other precautionary behaviours, as we work to bring this first wave to a close in our community.
  - The provincial government has indicated that mandating mask use is a local/regional decision. Municipalities in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) are taking coordinated action to require mask/face covering use in enclosed public spaces.
  - To support coordinated local efforts, the Medical Officer of Health has provided public health guidance and worked with Peel's local municipalities as they move to enact temporary municipal by-laws respecting the requirement to wear masks in enclosed public spaces as a measure to inhibit the spread of the COVID-19 virus.
  - Implementation of the municipal by-laws will be accompanied by an education campaign to raise awareness and understanding of the new requirements and support acceptability and compliance.
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## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Background**

Since March, Peel Public Health along with all levels of government have implemented various measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. As of July 03, 2020, Peel Public Health has investigated close to 6,300 cases of COVID-19 in the Region. While cases are currently on the decline, and Peel has entered Stage 2 of the provincial re-opening process, the risk for the ongoing spread of COVID-19 continues.

Peel Public Health recommends various public health measures be practiced by all residents in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19. These include the core four behaviours – 1) keeping a physical distance of two metres from others outside one's social circle, 2) frequent hand washing, 3) wearing a mask or face covering, especially in settings where it is difficult to maintain a physical distance from others, and 4) staying home and getting tested if you think you may have a COVID-19 infection.

As Peel continues to ease certain public health restrictions, in accordance with the Provincial Framework for re-opening, additional public health measures should be considered to prevent a resurgence of COVID-19 cases. Mandating use of non-medical masks/face coverings is one such measure. A non-medical mask or face coverings fits securely to the head and is large enough to completely and comfortably cover the mouth, nose and chin without gaping and is constructed of cloth, linen or other similar fabric.

Peel Public Health already strongly recommends the use of non-medical masks where distancing is not possible and has supported the mandated use of masks on transit. Time-limited, broader municipal by-laws mandating when and where non-medical masks are required will further strengthen these recommendations and protect Peel residents.

The provincial government has identified mandating use of masks/face coverings as a local decision. Local requirements need to be aligned with and are in addition to provincial requirements and guidance.

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### 2. Findings

#### a) Use of non-medical masks/face covering to reduce the spread of COVID-19

COVID-19 is transmitted through respiratory droplets spread when a person coughs, sneezes, or talks in close contact. Individuals can transmit the virus up to two days prior to onset of symptoms. A non-medical face mask/covering prevents respiratory droplets from being expelled into the air and onto surfaces. The scientific evidence on the effectiveness of non-medical mask use in public spaces to reduce COVID-19 transmission continues to evolve. Emerging and available evidence from studies and reports, however, indicates that:

- Non-medical masks/face coverings are beneficial for source control, that is, preventing the spread of respiratory droplets from the person wearing the mask to others, protecting others from the wearer, if they have a COVID infection<sup>1</sup>.
- There are population level benefits from mask use by the general public. Public compliance in the wearing of masks, combined with other measures such as physical distancing, can help manage re-opening activities (based on modelling studies)<sup>2</sup>.
- The risk for spreading COVID-19 appears to be higher in indoor settings compared to outdoors. Respiratory droplets from a person who is talking, coughing or sneezing can contaminate surfaces and may not fall as quickly to the ground when in the air due to less air ventilation indoors, and the flow of air in an indoor setting may contribute to the spread of the virus in a particular direction<sup>3</sup>.
- Societal norms and government policies supporting the wearing of masks by the public are independently associated with less mortality from COVID-19 and regions where masks were made mandatory earlier in the pandemic had lower new infections subsequent to the introduction of the masking policy compared to those that adopted policies later on in the outbreak<sup>4</sup>.

Masks alone do not prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, more consistent use of non-medical masks/face coverings by residents in public spaces may provide a visual cue that the pandemic is ongoing and remind residents of the need to continue to take preventive

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<sup>1</sup> Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). COVID-19 – What We Know So Far About...Wearing Masks in Public. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2020. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/covid-wwksf/what-we-know-public-masks-apr-7-2020.pdf?la=en>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lu, J, Kuibiao, J.G., Xu, C., Su, Wenzhe, Lai, Z., Zhou, D., Yu, C., Xu, B. & Yang, Z. COVID-19 Outbreak Associated with Air Conditioning in Restaurant, Guangzhou, China, 2020. EID Journal. 2020 July; 26(7). Available from: [https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/7/20-0764\\_article](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/7/20-0764_article)

<sup>4</sup> Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). COVID-19 – What We Know So Far About...Wearing Masks in Public. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2020. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/covid-wwksf/what-we-know-public-masks-apr-7-2020.pdf?la=en>

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measures. Mandated use of non-medical masks/face coverings would be an added measure together with other precautionary public health measures of physical distancing, handwashing, getting tested and staying home if sick, to help reduce transmission risk and bring this first wave to a close in Peel.

### **3. Proposed Direction**

#### **a) Coordinated Local Action**

On June 29, 2020, the Mayors from the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Areas (GTHA) wrote a letter requesting provincial action to enact a provincial mask regulation in large municipalities. The Province has advised that they will not make mask use mandatory at this time but that municipalities may do so. The GTHA mayors are proceeding with local actions related to mandated use of masks/face coverings in enclosed public spaces.

Based on the advice of the Medical Officer of Health regarding mandating mask/face covering use in enclosed public spaces, local municipalities in Peel are presenting proposed municipal by-laws in the City of Brampton, City of Mississauga and Town of Caledon the week of July 06.

The City of Toronto passed a mandatory masking by-law on June 30 and other GTHA and neighbouring jurisdictions are considering mandating the use of masks/face coverings in enclosed public spaces as a preventive public health measure.

Corresponding provincial and federal action is recommended so that enclosed public spaces under provincial and federal jurisdiction also require the use of non-medical masks/face coverings.

#### **b) Advice of the Medical Officer of Health**

To support local municipal action mandating the use of masks/face coverings, and bring consistency to the application of the existing strong recommendation to wear a non-medical mask where distancing is not possible, the Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

- Non-medical masks or face coverings, covering the nose, mouth and chin, without gaping, should be mandated to be worn by the public in enclosed public spaces. This includes enclosed public spaces that are now open as part of Stage 2 of provincial re-opening and public spaces that may open as part of later Stages of re-opening (e.g. indoor areas of restaurants and bars (masks would be removed for eating/drinking)).
- Some exemptions to enclosed public spaces should be considered, such as, employee-only areas, hospitals, schools, facilities providing day camps for children, etc.
- Exemptions should be included for individuals who are unable to wear a mask or face covering for medical reasons or reason of disability (e.g. asthma, respiratory illness, anxiety), children under two years old, or below five years old that cannot be persuaded to wear a mask by their caregiver, and other reasonable accommodations

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(e.g. inability to remove mask without assistance). Proof of exemption should not be required.

- Temporary removal of masks may be necessary for the purpose of receiving a service at a business or facility but should be minimized where possible.
- Mandatory mask/face covering by-laws should be time-limited and reviewed, and amended and extended if necessary, based on the state of the COVID-19 pandemic at the local and global level, the updated scientific evidence, and the easing of other public health restrictions as the province re-opens and its impact on the operation of businesses and facilities.
- The mandating of mask/face covering use should be done in good faith, with a focus on education and encouraging behaviour change rather than punitive enforcement.
- Mandating the use of masks/face coverings continues to be accompanied by other public health measures (e.g. hand washing, physical distancing) and it does not replace these measures.

### **c) Education Campaign**

The implementation of these new requirements under the local municipal by-laws needs to be accompanied by education and information to support understanding, acceptability and compliance. Peel Public Health will work with the local municipalities on accurate and appropriate:

- signage to be posted in public spaces covered by the by-laws;
- training materials for operators and staff on the requirements of the by-laws;
- information on the by-law requirements including when and where use of masks/face coverings is required and exemptions to the by-law; and,
- information on the importance of hand hygiene and other complementary protective behaviours as well as the intended purpose of masking and proper use and disposal of masks/face coverings.

### **d) Education and Enforcement**

The primary focus for Peel Public Health will be on education and clear communication on the importance of wearing a mask when physical distancing is not possible/challenging and where and when mask/face covering use is required. Local municipalities have advised that they intend to apply a similar approach. Peel residents have supported and implemented public health measures over the past four months. Given general acceptability of mask use during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is anticipated that most residents will follow the local by-law requirements for mask use in public spaces and do their part in protecting health and safety of their loved ones and community.

Coordination discussions related to education and enforcement are occurring between Local Municipal staff and Peel Public Health. A process is being put into place to respond to questions and complaints from the operators and the public, where the 311 telephone service will be the intake for calls related to the by-laws.

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### **4. Next steps and Implementation**

The municipal by-laws, related to mandatory use of non-medical mask/face coverings, are expected to come into force following Municipal Council consideration of the proposed by-laws in the week of July 06, 2020. Upon Regional Council approval of this report, Peel Public Health will work closely with the local municipalities to support effective implementation of the mandatory mask requirements focusing on education and clear communication of when and where mask use is required and the appropriate use and disposal of masks/face coverings and other complementary protective behaviours.

### **RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

There is a risk with respect to compliance with the requirements for mandatory mask/face covering use in enclosed public spaces. There are a few contributing factors, beyond the group of individuals who will be exempt from the requirements, including:

- Individuals who are not able to access face masks/coverings due to cost or availability.
- Individuals who choose not to follow the by-law.
- Challenges with enforcement of mandated mask/face covering use with existing resources.

Another important consideration is possible stigmatization of individuals who are unable to wear non-medical masks/face coverings. Individuals will be responsible for self-identifying as being exempt. Proof of exemption will not be required.

In addition, disposable masks may entail waste management issues and improper disposal.

Mitigating factors related to the above identified risks include that non-medical masks are fairly low cost and available (e.g. several local establishments are making disposable masks available to their clients/customers). Beyond non-medical masks, other face covering options are available including bandanas and scarves. Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need for balancing all public health measures taken to mitigate health hazards (e.g., quarantine, mask use) with the rights of individuals under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is important for the mandated requirements to be temporary and have a specified timeline and process for potential extension and repeal. The planned education campaign will focus on the importance of mask use and other complementary protective behaviours as our community re-opens, proper mask use and disposal, and the continued need for each of us to do our part and support one another to protect the health and safety of our loved ones and community.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The cost of the education campaign to support the implementation of mandatory mask/face covering use will be covered by the current approved operating budget. Peel Public Health will continue to track extraordinary COVID-19 costs for a possible reimbursement from the Province.

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*For further information regarding this report, please contact Dr. Lawrence Loh, Medical Officer of Health, extension 2856, Lawrence.loh@peelregion.ca*

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### ***Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:***

Department Commissioner, Division Director, Medical Officer of Health, Financial Support Unit and Legal Services.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Polsinelli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

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N. Polsinelli, Interim Chief Administrative Officer