



October 8th, 2020

Dear Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Dr. Theresa Tam, and Hon. Patty Hadju,

As the cases of COVID-19 in Canada are rising again across the country, we ask that you consider making a federal masking mandate. This will send a strong message that we are in this together and we can once again get this under control if we work together as a country, not as a patchwork of bylaws done at the municipal or provincial level. With interprovincial travel, and likely more international travel in the future, our community cases within the provinces that are not doing well will start to spread to the other provinces that are doing better. We need to learn from other countries by adopting measures from those that are doing well, and avoiding the mistakes of those that are doing poorly. It is up to your government to step up and keep us all safe and let our economy continue to recover.

We share in your frustration when you are upset by the private parties of young people who exceed the gathering limits, and have been very happy to see some provinces reduce the numbers for outdoor and indoor gathering limits in the regions with the most cases. What about the gathering limits of weddings and places of worship? We agree with mandatory masks for students. Why is this not uniform across the country for all students from K-12 and students in universities and colleges? We are very happy that some municipal bylaws have mandated masks in all indoor public spaces such as grocery stores and shopping malls, and on public transit such as buses, taxis, and ubers. What about private businesses, factories, hospitals, and common areas in condos/apartment buildings? We understand that businesses need to re-open so the economy can start to rebuild. However, why allow the continued operation of high-risk businesses such as indoor restaurants, indoor bars, indoor gyms/sports facilities without masks during exercise, casinos, and strip clubs?

To have our cake and eat it too, we need mandatory masking for our entire country in order to continue to prevent cases that are occurring in high-risk situations, the 3 C's:

- C - Crowded places
- C - Close-contact settings
- C - Closed spaces

Environments that violate the 3 C's include private businesses and factories, schools including universities and colleges, hospitals, common areas in condos/apartment buildings, weddings in banquet halls, places of worship, gyms/sports facilities, and private parties. In these situations, people often do not or are unable to distance due to the nature of the work, or there is a sense of "these are people we know and trust so there is no reason to distance from them." It is in these situations where mandatory masking will help to protect those we know and trust.



The CDC is acknowledging that COVID-19 can sometimes be spread through aerosols and not just droplets. This means that even if people are trying to avoid crowded spaces and close-contact by staying 2m apart, it is still possible for them to transmit the virus to each other in an enclosed, poorly ventilated space if they are not masked.

We want to avoid another lockdown. Mandatory lockdown, physical distancing, and hand hygiene were key to preventing the spread of COVID-19 initially. However, another lockdown is not sustainable for the economy and has some health consequences as well. So in order to continue to safely re-open, if we remove the lockdown then it is important to add another layer of protection with masks. Out of all of these preventative measures, only masks that are properly worn can stop the virus at its source. Masks are a very low cost measure compared to the incredibly high costs of testing, ER and assessment centre visits, and ICU stays which are already overwhelming the system and are increasing at rates that we will soon be unable to control.

Dr. Tam's message about masking has turned 180 degrees from initially discouraging public masking to recommending it. But a recommendation, even a strong one, has not been enough. By making masks mandatory, hopefully we will be able to achieve 80% masking which is needed in order to reduce transmission. Those who are able to mask will protect those amongst us who are the most vulnerable including those who cannot protect themselves, those who are at high risk, those who are disadvantaged, and those who are medically exempt. You may worry that masking might cause people to reduce other measures such as hand hygiene and physical distancing but the opposite effect has actually been seen in some recent studies [1] [2] [3] [4]. You may also worry about how to enforce this, but we recommend educating the public on how to wear a mask properly (covering both the nose and mouth at all times) and providing a good mask (3-layered cloth or disposable mask, not a bandana, neck gaiter, valved mask, or mingle mask) instead of fines/penalties.

This is no different than smoking indoors, drinking and driving, or texting while driving. We need to protect each other during this very difficult time so that not another Canadian gets sick or dies from COVID-19.

Thank you for thinking of and caring for your people,

Masks4Canada team

<https://masks4canada.org/about/team/>

References:

[1] <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2005.12446.pdf> (Italy)

[2] <https://osf.io/es7kt/> (Germany)

[3] <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.06.11.20128900v3> (Thailand)

[4] <https://brighterworld.mcmaster.ca/articles/new-polling-from-mcmaster-researcher-majority-of-canadians-already-started-wearing-masks-ahead-of-official-recommendation/> (Canada)