

Joint Statement – Mayor Jim Watson and Councillor Keith Egli

Over the course of Ottawa's response to COVID-19, Dr. Vera Etches and Ottawa Public Health (OPH) have encouraged the use of cloth masks when unable to maintain a two-metre physical distance. It is not always possible to know going into an indoor public space whether or not maintaining a two-metre physical distance can occur. It is often dependent upon the nature of the space and the number and actions of others. Additionally, increasing scientific evidence indicates that the use of masks is an important measure to help control the spread of COVID-19.

This is why the City of Ottawa will join other municipalities across the Province of Ontario and will mandate the use of cloth masks in many indoor public spaces.

The City of Ottawa has engaged in conversations with City partners, neighbouring health units and members of the business community to explore all possibilities for the establishment of a City of Ottawa By-law requiring residents to wear a cloth mask. Following these conversations, the City of Ottawa is confident in moving forward with the decision to mandate cloth mask use in indoor public spaces.

In speaking with the members of our business community, we've heard from business owners that they are in favour of mandating the wearing of cloth masks in indoor public spaces. This by-law would ensure that all businesses are on a level playing field. The decrease in transmission will benefit our local economy by allowing increased use of our excellent local establishments and greater customer comfort. We believe that one of the many ways to support local small businesses is to do whatever we can, such as wearing a cloth mask, to help them stay open.

The motion to institute a by-law ensuring that residents of the City of Ottawa wear a cloth mask that covers their nose, mouth and chin, without any gaping in certain circumstances will be brought up at Council on July 15th. The Motion will be moved by Councillor Egli and seconded by Mayor Watson.

Until such by-law is in effect in Ottawa, the four health units in the Champlain region are looking at a regional approach to mandate masks in their respective jurisdictions. More information about this regional approach will be provided at a joint media availability on Monday, July 6 to be held with Medical Officer's of Health from four surrounding public health units.

Ottawa Public Health's most recent public engagement survey found that the vast majority of residents from Ottawa are willing to have cloth masks use made mandatory in stores in order for them to feel comfortable shopping. Socializing and normalizing cloth masks in indoor public places will help protect our community. According to phase 1 of OPH's engagement survey, 90 per cent of respondents said that they would willingly wear a cloth mask in order to be allowed access to services. In our phase 2 survey, so far 73 per cent of respondents say they already wear a cloth mask when visiting an indoor public space.

In addition, we strongly believe that the benefits of wide-spread cloth mask use will set us up for a better transition into Stage 3. The Province of Ontario states that a transition to Stage 3 will only be allowed if it can be done as safely as possible. The wide-spread use of cloth masks will assist with better protecting Ottawa residents from COVID-19 transmission during the transition to Stage 3.

The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented and has impacted the way we live, work and play. Information about the virus continues to evolve but what we know today is that wearing cloth masks is a key component to protecting our community from COVID-19.

Community spirit is strong in Ottawa. It is important to state that there may be many in our community who won't be able to wear a cloth mask due to a variety of reasons such as pre-existing medical conditions, being a child under the age of two, being someone who requires accommodation in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code or someone who is hearing impaired or who is communicating with a person who is hearing impaired. Please be prepared to see some individuals in public without cloth masks and we ask that you please be respectful.

We understand that this a change for many. Be patient. Be kind with yourself and others. Wearing a cloth mask in indoor public spaces is new to many of us and will be an adjustment. We are all in this together. Let's continue to protect the people who live in our city because wearing a cloth mask is a small sacrifice if it means saving lives and reducing the spread of COVID-19 in Ottawa. My cloth mask protects you, and your cloth masks protects me.