

July 7, 2020

Dear Regional Council of York,

With the impending vote for mandatory use of masks put forth for consideration by York Region council on July 9th, which will determine the fate of its residents and those who are employed within its boundaries, it is my hope that you will give serious consideration to the content of this letter as you prepare to vote.

I am a 35 year resident of East Gwillimbury, a long-standing resident of York Region and I work in the health and well-being field. I stand with a number of your concerned residents on this upcoming vote, so you may receive a number of these similar letters as the combined voice of us is sent through.

When making policy, it must be reasonable and proportionate to the threat. I accept that Covid 19 is real and people are getting sick, but mandatory masking as a solution to stop the spread is not founded in science. Supporting this policy change, given there is no foundation in science to support it and knowledge that doing so will place some residents of York Region in peril is clear misfeasance on the part of government.

The use of masks should remain choice not mandated for individuals and employees.

Masks have never been a formal recommendation to Canadian citizens until recently when it was suggested that changes in science are now supporting value in mask use. Despite such a declaration, there is no support from the World Health Organization, or any document published by the Federal or Provincial governments of Canada that validates it. As Mayor/Councillor you are often faced with decisions related to risk and it is with respect that you have made decisions based on clear and concise evidence. It is imperative that this decision be made based on the best possible outcome and with the least negative results. I implore you to consider not only the facts related to the science, but also the impact that mandating masks may have on a large part of the York Region population.

The primary argument for the recommendation and proposed mandating of masks is based on the presumed spread from asymptomatic persons within the population. It is being suggested that significant proof exists that shows asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic individuals are rapid spreaders of the virus in the general population. On the contrary, the documents published both by Canadian authorities and the World Health Organization suggest that this is not true. Even Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, W.H.O.'s Technical Lead for Covid 19, has stated that asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic persons are not the individuals on whom we should be concentrating our efforts.

For simplicity I have relied on the W.H.O.'s reports and updates trusting on their broad experience from countries worldwide as a guide. Cases reported on their website state that pre-symptomatic individuals trace back to those living in close quarters - supporting that long term, close contact are the critical factor for transmission from this group. Conversely the limited studies that exist on asymptomatic individuals points to evidence that this group is unlikely to spread the virus.

The W.H.O.'s June 11, 2020 news updateⁱ and their June 5th publication on mask use in the communityⁱⁱ both affirm that most transmissions occur from symptomatic people through close contact with others therefore solidifying that only those people should be wearing masks. Despite this, the Ontario Health Authorities are continuing to put pressure on municipalities and regions to not just recommend mask use but mandate it. With the knowledge that asymptomatic people are a minimal risk to transmit the virus, the mandating of masks is an act of malfeasance on the part of the government.

Further consideration should be given to the fact that training and education on the use of PPE starts in medical and nursing schools and continues throughout the careers of medical professionals. It is therefore unreasonable to expect adequate training through the use of infographics provided by government to community members to ensure appropriate use and mitigate against infection or harm.

As outlined in the W.H.O.'s report, government is exposing community wearers to potential harm and risk of improper and/or prolonged use of a medical mask from the following:

- Self-contamination due to the manipulation of the mask by contaminated hands.
- Potential self-contamination that can occur if medical masks are not changed when wet, soiled, or damaged
- Possible development of facial skin lesions, irritants, dermatitis or worsened acne when used frequently for long hours

- The false sense of security, leading to the potential for less adherence to well recognized preventative measures such as physical distancing and hand hygiene.
- Risk of droplet transmission and of splashes to the eyes if mask wearing is not combined with eye protection
- And creating disadvantages for or difficulty wearing masks by specifically vulnerable populations such as those with mental health disorders, developmental disabilities, the deaf and hard of hearing community and children.

Of grave concern are the impacts on those who are directly disadvantaged by the mandating of masks. To provide a high level of understanding of what that means to residents of York Region are the statistics below:

- 5% or 55,000 of York Region’s population are deafⁱⁱⁱ and rely on lip reading to communicate, mandatory masking would leave them in a world of complete silence.
- 4% or 44,000 of York Regions population suffer from a mental illness^{iv}, many of whom may be unable to wear a mask as a result of PTSD (such as victims of sexual assault and physical abuse – often women), extreme anxiety or fear of closed spaces. The need to disclose this private information to others just to seek exception is undignified and potentially against their human rights.
- 3% or 33,000 of York Regions population suffer from Learning and Developmental Disabilities^v and 1.4% or 15,000 elderly individuals in York Region suffer from a cognitive impairment^{vi} which is expected to grow to just under 20,000 by 2021. These individuals may not be easily identified by store owners or enforcement and penalized and chastised unnecessarily
- 15.1% or 166,760 children 12 and under^{vii} live in York Region. Mandating masks poses real harm to this group, enforcing it when returning to school means wearing masks for 6 – 8 hour per day. Consideration is needed on the health impacts from prolonged use mentioned in the W.H.O’s report as well as impacts on self-esteem, learning and development of vital social skills all caused from masking vital emotional indicators necessary to psychological development in children.
- 12.7% or 139,700 of York Region residents live in poverty^{viii} many of whom may struggle to afford masks and may be working in essential jobs where they will be required to wear for prolonged periods of time. The potential for reuse and improper use by this group needs serious consideration.

Recognizing that these may not be the only groups impacted if there is a regional decision to mandate masks, it is a sizable number of the population nonetheless representing 41.2% of York Region residents or 453,200 people.

I want to thank you for your very valuable time and consideration on this very serious matter. In closing I would also recommend that you take the time to review the W.H.O’s report in full. It can be found at <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/332293> . In addition this letter sent by a nurse to a councillor in Ward 5 in Markham (<https://ward5markham.ca/should-wearing-masks-be-made-mandatory-in-public-indoor-places/>) has some compelling information also worth considering.

Sincerely,

Karen Armstrong, Holland Landing
 Christine Marrin, Holland Landing
 Amanda McFadyen, Newmarket
 Cassandra Villeneuve-Avis, Holland Landing
 Nicole Meltzer, Newmarket
 Christine Perrault, King Township
 Carla Smith, Queensville
 Theresa Gagnon, Holland Landing

ⁱ <http://www.emro.who.int/media/news/transmission-of-covid-19-by-asymptomatic-cases.html>

ⁱⁱ [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-outbreak](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak)

ⁱⁱⁱ Source York Region 2020 – 2023 Multi-year Accessibility Plan by YRP - https://www.york.ca/wps/wcm/connect/yorkpublic/41bb28df-a3a0-421c-9159-5b0bb26ada19/2020_to_2023_Multi-Year_Accessibility_Plan.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=n7chlZs

^{iv} source York Region 2020 – 2023 Multi-year Accessibility Plan by YRP https://www.york.ca/wps/wcm/connect/yorkpublic/41bb28df-a3a0-421c-9159-5b0bb26ada19/2020_to_2023_Multi-Year_Accessibility_Plan.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=n7chlZs

^v source York Region 2020 – 2023 Multi-year Accessibility Plan by YRP

^{vi} source: York Region Senior Strategy – Senior Health in York Region – <https://www.york.ca/wps/wcm/connect/yorkpublic/2d5d45ba-1f1f-4f0f-9155-6b2371da440e/YR+Seniors+Strategy.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mu9bx75>

^{vii} source: A Profile of Children in York Region, November 2019 – <https://www.york.ca/wps/wcm/connect/yorkpublic/50325d6f-3214-4a9b-a0a2-e415b455724b/A-Profile-of-Children-in-York-Region.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mXRCCKC>

^{viii} source: York Region Action on Poverty Profile - Social Planning Network of Ontario - <https://www.spno.ca/images/pdf/povertyprofiles/york/York-Cover-Page.pdf>