

Mandatory Face Coverings

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic remains a health risk and Calgarians continue to follow health and safety guidelines provided by the Government of Alberta. With businesses reopening, more social interactions and the number of cases increasing, additional measures should be considered to better mitigate a potential resurgence, including mandating face coverings in indoor public spaces and public vehicles, where physical distancing of two meters may be challenging or not possible.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

- 1) Mandate the wearing of face coverings on all transit vehicles effective 2020 August 1 and direct Administration to develop an implementation plan;
- 2) Direct the City Manager to develop and implement a data-driven policy for if and when to mandate face coverings in all indoor City-owned or operated properties; and
- 3) Direct Administration to report back to Council in September with a strategy for managing a second wave of COVID-19, including a proposed face coverings bylaw to define staged phases and triggers, similar in form to the current water restrictions phases in the Water Utility Bylaw.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

On 2020 March 16, through report C2020-0390 *COVID-19: Corporate Response Update*, Council endorsed The City's COVID-19 governance structure to support four primary objectives:

1. Be responsible partners to help "flatten the curve" and protect human safety.
2. Support our employees.
3. Maintain appropriate City of Calgary services to our community.
4. Prepare for the resilience of our organization and our community.

BACKGROUND

On 2020 March 11, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic related to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The COVID-19 pandemic remains a significant public health risk. Alberta's Relaunch Strategy's gradual reopening of businesses and resumption of activities has resulted in more people gathering in public, returning to the workplace and taking public transit, making the ability to physically distance difficult, or in some cases impossible. The benefits of reopening businesses must be balanced with measures to address the safety of the public. Mandating the wearing of face coverings in indoor public spaces and public vehicles is a measure that can help mitigate a potential resurgence as is being experienced in other parts of the world.

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INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

The Chief Medical Officer of Health for Alberta, Chief Public Health Officer for Canada and the World Health Organization strongly recommend the wearing of masks or face coverings to limit the spread of COVID-19 where physical distancing cannot be maintained, in addition to other public health measures. Even with a strong recommendation by all orders of government, public surveys have indicated only 34 per cent of Calgarians say they always wear a face mask in public and confined spaces such as grocery stores, shopping malls and on public transit.

A phased and purposeful approach to mandating face coverings in indoor public places will address immediate concerns – including the inability to maintain physical distancing on public transit – while allowing for continued monitoring of COVID-19 in Calgary. Staged phases and established triggers based on public health monitoring will ensure that the bylaw would be implemented when needed. This approach will allow Administration to engage with the local business community and the community-at-large to identify opportunities in advance of a mandatory face coverings bylaw.

An enforceable temporary bylaw will help protect the health, safety and well-being of all Calgarians. Public surveys have indicated 74 per cent of Calgarians either strongly or somewhat support making face masks/coverings mandatory in public and confined spaces. While the Government of Alberta would be in the best position to mandate the wearing of face coverings by the general public, if The City were to enact regulations, the best option for doing so would be to harness Council's authority through the Municipal Government Act to enact bylaws with respect to the safety, health and welfare of people and the protection of people and property along with enacting bylaws related to businesses.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

A COVID-19 snapshot survey of 500 Calgarians was conducted between 2020 June 8-14. Three-quarters of Calgarians support making face masks/coverings mandatory in public and confined spaces. A further summary of engagement, as well as recent surveys on Calgarians' views on face coverings and COVID-19 is included in Attachment 1: COVID-19 Snapshot Survey.

A Calgary Transit survey of a standing online panel which had 170 respondents between 2020 May 28 and 2020 June 7 found that 63 per cent noted that mandatory face masks/coverings would make them feel more comfortable/safe on transit vehicles. A summary of the Calgary Transit survey is included in Attachment 2.

Strategic Alignment

This report aligns with the following 2019-2022 Citizen Priorities:

- A City of Safe and Inspiring Neighbourhoods: Every Calgarian lives in a safe, mixed and inclusive neighbourhood and has the right and opportunity to participate in civic life. All neighbourhoods are desirable and have equitable public investments.
- A City That Moves: Calgary's transportation network offers a variety of convenient, affordable, accessible and efficient transportation choices.

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- A Well-Run City: Calgary has a modern and efficient municipal government that is focused on resilience and continuous improvement to make life better every day for Calgarians by learning from citizens, partners, and others

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

A staged approach will afford Administration time to consider the social implications for all Calgarians, including implications of a mandatory face covering bylaw on those living with disabilities. This approach will also afford Administration time to properly engage with Calgary's business community to better understand the economic impact of a mandatory face coverings bylaw.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

There are no current or future operating budget impacts associated with this report.

Current and Future Capital Budget:

There are no current or future capital budget impacts associated with this report.

Risk Assessment

The risks associated with a phased approach to requiring face coverings indoors or where physical distancing cannot be maintained have been considered. The ability to adequately enforce mandatory wearing of face coverings will be challenging. Administration will seek to achieve compliance through education and will continue to communicate hygiene and other prevention measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Some people may not have access to face coverings and/or may not be able to comply with requirements. Administration will include a distribution system at public facilities to support the mandate.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

The most efficient way to enact mandatory masking regulation would be through a Chief Medical Officer of Health order as has been done with other measures to support a healthy relaunch while keeping Albertans safe and preventing the spread of COVID-19. However, since this has not yet been enacted, a phased approach to requiring face coverings in indoor public spaces in the City of Calgary is appropriate at this time.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. COVID-19 Snapshot Survey
2. Calgary Transit Survey
3. Public Submissions

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