

## Temporary Face Covering Bylaw and COVID-19 Update

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That Council direct Administration to return to Council on 2021 July 26 with a repeal of the Temporary Face Covering Bylaw on 2021 July 31 if vaccination rates and COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are trending in the right direction.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- Administration has identified four options for repealing the Temporary COVID-19 Face Coverings Bylaw and is recommending that it be repealed on 2021 July 31 after the Government of Alberta has moved to Stage 3 of the *Open for Summer Plan*.
- What does this mean to Calgarians? The Government of Alberta will move to Stage 3 on 2021 July 1. Repealing the Face Coverings Bylaw on 2021 July 31 responds to local context and will allow time:
  - To ensure that Stage 3 of the *Open for Summer Plan* does not lead to an immediate increase in COVID-19 cases in Calgary;
  - For newly eligible Calgarians to receive their second dose of vaccine; and
  - To ensure that recent outbreaks of more transmissible variants in Calgary do not lead to another resurgence.
- Why does it matter? Calgarians are eager to get back to normal life and want a balanced approach to public health and the economy. The timeline proposed provides a low impact measure to prevent COVID-19 transmission while businesses reopen and offers a specific end date for the Face Coverings Bylaw if there are no further restrictions on operations in indoor public spaces announced by the Government of Alberta.
- Stage 3 establishes reasonable, medical expert-supported metrics for easing of restrictions. It provides a triggering point aligned with previously identified criteria for when the Face Coverings Bylaw could be repealed. However, it is a province-wide approach and Calgary's bylaw provides The City with the ability to respond to Calgarians' views, the impacts of variants and vaccines, and upcoming festivals and events.
- Strategic Alignment to Council's Citizen Priorities: A city of safe and inspiring neighbourhoods
- Background and Previous Council Direction is included as Attachment 1.

### **DISCUSSION**

On 2020 July 21, Council passed the Temporary COVID-19 Face Coverings Bylaw, based on recommendations from the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Alberta, Chief Public Health Officer for Canada and the World Health Organization, to wear face coverings to limit the spread of COVID-19 where physical distancing cannot be maintained. The bylaw was passed in the absence of a provincial mask mandate. On 2020 November 24, the Government of Alberta announced mandatory mask

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requirements in indoor workplaces and facilities outside the home for Calgary and surrounding areas.

In a report to the 2020 December 14 Council meeting, Administration committed to continued monitoring of local indicators including transmission rates, infections, hospitalizations, patients in intensive care, and deaths. The report also anticipated that the Face Coverings Bylaw will most likely be repealed when these local indicators are at a sufficiently low level, and the uptake of a safe and effective vaccine at a sufficiently high level, that medical experts agree that face coverings are no longer recommended in mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

Administration has identified four options to repeal the Temporary COVID-19 Face Coverings Bylaw:

- 1) Repeal the bylaw on 2021 July 31.
- 2) Repeal the bylaw in alignment with Stage 3 of the *Open for Summer Plan*.
- 3) Repeal the bylaw when 75 per cent of eligible Calgarians are fully vaccinated.
- 4) Make no amendments to existing Council direction to repeal or amend the bylaw no later than 2021 December.

**Attachment 2** provides a summary of the four options including rationale and risks.

The Government of Alberta's *Open for Summer Plan* considers hospitalization and vaccination rates and provides a decision-point at which to repeal the Face Coverings Bylaw. Stage 3 of the plan, scheduled to occur 2021 July 1. Repealing the bylaw on 2021 July 31 would acknowledge unique local circumstances, allow more Calgarians to receive their first and second dose of the vaccine and will afford time to ensure that Stage 3 does not correspond with an increase of COVID-19 cases in Calgary.

While the *Open for Summer Plan* aligns with expected criteria and provides a decision point for the Province of Alberta, maintaining Calgary's Face Coverings Bylaw until 2021 July 31 during reopening aligns with the feedback heard in our COVID-19 survey that 80 per cent of Calgarians feel more confident visiting businesses and participating in public activities because of the bylaw. The proposed timeline provides a specific date for Calgarians when the bylaw will be repealed and will afford time to ensure that more transmissible variants of COVID-19 and the lifting of provincial restrictions do not lead to a resurgence.

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION (EXTERNAL)**

- ☐ Public Engagement was undertaken
- ☐ Public Communication or Engagement was not required
- ☐ Public/Stakeholders were informed
- ☐ Stakeholder dialogue/relations were undertaken

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The latest COVID-19 Snapshot Survey (Attachment 3) again highlighted the increased confidence that Calgarians feel being in public spaces due to the Face Coverings Bylaw. Eighty per cent of respondents indicated they are “more willing or confident to go shopping, visit restaurants, ride transit, or do other activities in public” as a result of the bylaw.

Maintaining the Face Coverings Bylaw until 2021 July 31 will provide extra assurance to Calgarians until it has been demonstrated that COVID-19 indicators can remain low once Alberta has entered Stage 3.

Internal stakeholders including business units with public-facing services were consulted in forming the report’s recommendation.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Social**

The Face Coverings Bylaw was intended as one of several measures designed to limit the transmission of COVID-19 and to protect those most vulnerable to the virus. The recommended option provides a least-harm approach, maintaining a safeguard until there is greater certainty that Stage 3 won’t correspond with a resurgence of COVID-19.

#### **Environmental**

Not Applicable

#### **Economic**

In the most recent snapshot survey (Attachment 3), when asked about balancing public health or the economy when reopening Calgary, 61 per cent of respondents indicated a preference to prioritize both equally, 28 per cent thought health should be prioritized and 11 per cent thought the economy should be prioritized.

The recommended option provides a balance by maintaining a safeguard against potential COVID-19 transmission without limiting economic activity. This option also maintains the bylaw which has led to increased public confidence to be in public spaces during the first few weeks of Stage 3 when concern over being in crowded public spaces is likely to be at its highest.

#### **Service and Financial Implications**

#### **No anticipated financial impact**

### **RISK**

There is a risk of increased transmission corresponding with lower face covering usage if the requirements for moving to Stage 3 of the provincial plan are insufficient to suppress further waves of COVID-19. Administration is recommending direction to have the Face Coverings Bylaw be maintained until 2021 July 31 providing time to ensure that Stage 3 does not correspond with a further wave of COVID-19.

**Community Services Report to  
Combined Meeting of Council  
2021 June 21**

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There is a risk that the Government of Alberta may take steps to invalidate the Face Coverings Bylaw.

Attachment 2 details additional risks associated with each of the identified options.

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

1. Previous Council Direction, Background
2. Options for Repealing the Temporary COVID-19 Face Coverings Bylaw
3. Citizen Perspectives COVID-19 Snapshot Survey

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform