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April 18, 2020

Mayor Clark,

Council Members,

Members of the Governance and Priorities Committee

Re: plans to introduce mandatory face masks in Saskatoon

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

I strenuously object to the possibility that face masks are to be made mandatory because of covid.

I have objections on two grounds:

- 1) There is no necessity for mandating masks.
- 2) Mandated masks are harmful to individuals and society.

1) No necessity for masks, mandated or not, when the virus is visibly feeble, and perhaps has been even before the lockdown in mid-March.

The statistics are clear: In 159 days Saskatchewan has had 22 deaths, **2** of them in Saskatoon; we have presently 173 “active” cases in the province and **27** of them in Saskatoon. It is important to know what these “active” cases are, as positive test results is described by the CDC as follows:

*“A positive test result shows you may have antibodies from an infection with the virus the causes COVID-19. **However, there is a chance a positive result means you have antibodies from an infection with a virus from the same family of viruses (called coronaviruses), such as the one that causes the common cold.**” (Emphasis added.)*

It is evident that not only do we have very few deaths and few “cases” in Saskatchewan and particularly Saskatoon, but our recovery rate is also extraordinarily high, in the 95% or more. Even in the rest of Canada, the bulk of covid deaths, 90% of them, according to Canada’s chief medical officer, Dr. Tam, have taken place in Ontario and Quebec nursing homes, leaving generally low numbers of other deaths in the remaining provinces, which have similarly high recovery rates.

When moves are being made to get back to the “old normal,” it makes no sense for the City of Saskatoon to undertake the forced masking of its population at the moment when the covid horse has already left the barn, and is showing no sign of returning any time soon!

2) The masks are vigorously promoted by public officials and the media in the name of “safety,” yet there is **no solid scientific evidence** that they actually protect the wearer or

others against infections, whether viral or other, but there is evidence that they can cause harm to individuals and society.

Regarding their effectiveness in preventing infections, there are claims, but no proof, and even senior health officials in the WHO have for months urged people NOT to rely on masks and have also stated that healthy people should not wear them. When it has recently started to suggest that perhaps masks protect, after all, and should be worn, one is left seriously questioning such as “flexible” science that seemingly flips and flops. On this very topic, of the WHO apparently "modifying" its earlier position on masks, two scientists, Joseph Hickey and Denis Rancourt, have written an open letter to the WHO on behalf of the Ontario Civil Liberties Association, which I suggest that the Mayor and Councillors study in their deliberations, because it thoroughly challenges the WHO's all-over-the-map position on masks.

<http://ocla.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-06-21-Letter-OCLA-to-WHO-DG.pdf>

Another critic of masking has assessed what many claim to be the “new evidence” that is asserting that masks are both effective and necessary. The critic is none other than **Richard Schabas**, former Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health and former Chief of Medical Staff, York Central Hospital, Ontario, with experience with previous viruses such as SARS and MERS. He offers his assessment of the "new evidence" commentary on his Facebook, and concludes with:

*Do masks work for Covid? I don't know. Maybe. **However, the evidence is weak and insufficient to support mandatory laws.***

<https://www.facebook.com/richard.schabas/posts/10217702015932136>

(Dr. Schabas is also one of the 18 Canadian health experts who have written an Open Letter to the Prime Minister and all provincial leaders with suggestions on how to move away from the lockdown and its rigid “measures.” I believe their assessment and proposals are essential reading for our municipal politicians as well. See www.balancedresponse.ca.)

When it comes to the harms to the individual, even the WHO recognizes some: (quoted in the Hickey-Rancourt Open Letter to WHO):

- potential increased risk of self -contamination due to the manipulation of a face mask and subsequently touching eyes with contaminated hands;
- potential self-contamination that can occur if non-medical masks are not changed when wet or soiled. This can create favourable conditions for microorganism to amplify;
- potential headache and/or breathing difficulties, depending on type of mask used;
- potential development of facial skin lesions, irritant dermatitis or worsening acne, when used frequently for long hours;

- difficulty with communicating clearly;

There are many others. You need to pay particular attention to the negatives and “foreseeable harms” that masks cause and why their mandatory use must be avoided at all cost, listed in the same letter by the two authors (pp.7-9).

But I speak from personal experience, as I am one of the countless people for whom masks are more than some momentary inconvenience and discomfort: I simply can't wear one because I need to have access to oxygen, and when air is obstructed I start to feel faint and breathless, and have to remove the mask so I don't actually faint. My inability to wear a mask has to do with bronchial problems, but others with different health issues have the same experience. I will not have any difficulty in getting a document from my doctor stating my inability to wear a mask, but I don't want to live in a society and city where I have to go around showing assorted authorities — and perhaps even my suspicious fellow citizens — my medical history, in order to avoid being coerced to wear a mask or being denied access to various facilities, public transit being an important one for me. There are also people who suffer from claustrophobia and for whom the forced mask creates an existential nightmare, as it does for other psychologically vulnerable people.

Masks obstruct and affect all people in various ways primarily because **they make speaking and hearing, i.e. communication,** very difficult, if not impossible. People who already are hard-of-hearing as very many older people are, are seriously handicapped by masks, but other age groups are similarly affected, particularly young children who need to watch people speak to fully understand what they are saying and to learn to speak themselves. Deaf people, of course, are completely dependent on being able to read lips, which masks prevent.

People from different language backgrounds are additionally negatively affected because they will be understood less and will also understand less of others' masked speech, making isolation from their fellow citizens a more permanent state. An immigrant will have more difficulties in learning English if she/he cannot hear it clearly and is not able to watch lips.

There are countless negatives when masking is made mandatory, but the essential one is forcing people outside of society, into loneliness and alienation, when participation and social interaction is made difficult, if not impossible. There is also hostility and paranoia on the part of those who believe in masks and wear them without major difficulty; they have little tolerance for those who can't, and don't hesitate to express that intolerance online and in real life, something I and many others have already experienced, even without mandated masking! Fear of ostracism will push more people who cannot wear masks to stay away from any activities where masking is required, adding to psychologically damaging social isolation.

IN CONCLUSION: There is clearly no need for mandated masking because covid-19 has no real presence in our lives in Saskatchewan and particularly in Saskatoon. Those who remain unnecessarily fear-ridden about the virus despite the statistics, should continue to wear a mask if they believe it somehow protects them — despite the lack of evidence — but others should not be forced to accommodate their fears by wearing a mask. Coerced masking creates countless problems for people and their functioning in society, and cannot be justified merely on the basis of questionable and unscientific beliefs that by mass-masking we somehow control the remaining few instances of covid-19. And just because some cities and districts have made the serious mistake of forcing masks on their

populations, does not mean Saskatoon should rush into making the same mistake!

Sincerely,

Marjaleena Repo

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