

COVID-19 Update: Masking in City Facilities

ISSUE

The emergence of the SARS CoV-2 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) resulted in several adjustments to operating protocols at City of Saskatoon (City) facilities and to City Occupational Health and Safety and business continuity processes. These adjustments followed the public health directions from the Government of Canada, the Government of Saskatchewan, and Saskatchewan Health Authority local medical health officers to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace and community. The Government of Saskatchewan removed the last of the Public Health Orders on February 28, including those on mandatory face masking. The lifting of the Public Health Orders does not mean there is no longer a risk of COVID-19 in Saskatoon but shifts the risk management responsibility from the provincial government to individuals, businesses, organizations, and municipalities.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That effective April 4, 2022, people accessing City facilities, including Saskatoon Transit, are no longer required to wear a face mask;
2. That all persons accessing all City facilities, including Saskatoon Transit, be encouraged to wear a face mask; and
3. That the City continue to have face masks available for persons accessing City facilities, including Saskatoon Transit, upon request.

BACKGROUND

At its February 8, 2022 Special Meeting, City Council considered a report from Saskatoon Fire and resolved, in part:

That upon the rescission of the existing “Public Health Order Mandatory Isolation and Face Covering” by the Government of Saskatchewan, City Council continue the requirement, as approved at its August 30, 2021, Regular Business Meeting, that all persons accessing all City facilities, including Saskatoon Transit, wear a face mask in the manner and form as directed under the rescinded public health order;

That the Administration report back monthly to Governance and Priorities Committee starting in March 2022, with a written COVID update that includes a recommendation on whether or not to continue the requirement of face masking for all persons accessing all City facilities; and

That the City of Saskatoon continue to have masks available to riders on Transit buses.

At its March 21, 2022 Public Meeting, the Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC) considered a report of the City Clerk and resolved:

That consideration of a report from the Administration be deferred to the March 28, 2022, Regular Business meeting of City Council.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Since March 2020, when the first reported case of COVID-19 emerged in Saskatoon, the City has implemented various measures to prioritize the health and safety of residents and employees while continuing to provide civic services. The City complied with all Government of Saskatchewan Public Health Orders, when available, and consulted with the Saskatchewan Health Authority local Medical Health Officers on COVID-19 transmission mitigation measures.

When the Saskatchewan Public Health Orders were lifted, the City returned to following Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) and business continuity processes in managing the response to COVID-19 in its workplaces and community. In doing so, the City consults with the Saskatchewan Health Authority local Medical Health Officers and takes their advice on potential risk mitigation measures. The Saskatoon Emergency Management Organization continues to monitor the COVID-19 impacts on City staff and services in accordance with the COVID-19 Response Levels (Appendix 1).

As noted in the February 8, 2022 City Council resolution, the City extended the masking requirement in City facilities beyond the expiration of the Public Health Order. This was intended to be a temporary measure to help transition the community to a new COVID-19 environment. The Administration committed to reporting monthly to City Council (or committee), advising it of any policy continuation or change.

Since the expiration of the Public Health Orders and the removal of mandatory masking, people have adjusted to a more discretionary masking environment. Anecdotally, it appears that those who are interested in continuing to wear a mask are doing so and those who are uninterested in wearing a mask are not. This discretionary approach to masking supports an environment where people can assess their own risk tolerance as to whether to wear a mask or not.

Given this adjustment, changing from a mandatory approach to a discretionary approach appears to be a reasonable step for the City to take. One major benefit is that it relieves some of the pressure on staff to enforce the mandatory masking, although they may continue to encourage everyone to wear masks until such time that COVID-19 and its transmission are behind us. Part of this encouragement will include “Masks Recommended” signage placed in City facilities and on buses so that people feel safe and welcome to wear a mask. Changing the signage and the audible announcements on the buses will take a few days, so an effective date of April 4 is recommended. Masks will continue to be available to those who are interested in wearing a mask but do not have one available.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The major financial implication emerging from the recommendations in this report relates to supplying masks for public use. The Administration estimates that discretionary masking will cost approximately \$1100 per week.

NEXT STEPS

The lifting of the requirement for the public to wear face masks when accessing City facilities, including Saskatoon Transit, will be communicated, along with encouragement to continue wearing a face mask when accessing those facilities. Supplies of masks will be maintained for Saskatoon Transit and at public entrances to City facilities to support the continued wearing of face masks.

APPENDICES

1. Saskatoon Emergency Management – COVID-19 Response Levels

Report Approval

Written by: Reché McKeague, Q.C., Solicitor
Mike Jordan, Chief Public Policy and Government Relations Office

Reviewed by: Pamela Goulden-McLeod, Director of Emergency Management
Morgan Hackl, Fire Chief

Approved by: Jeff Jorgenson, City Manager

Admin Report - COVID-19 Update: Masking in City Facilities.docx