

City Council votes to enact mandatory mask by-law

July 14, 2020 — The City is adding masks to its toolkit in the fight against COVID-19, with a new mandatory masks by-law coming into effect this Friday.

City Council passed a by-law Monday requiring owners and/or operators of enclosed public spaces, to require mask use by those entering their establishments, in addition to the provision of hand sanitizer at entrances. The move comes as the City attempts to move forward with its STC Framework for Recovery, while taking steps to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 transmission associated with reopening.

The City will undertake a campaign of public education, and support for operators impacted by the new requirements, before bringing the by-law fully into effect on Friday, July 17, 2020.

COVID-19 spreads readily in indoor spaces, especially where physical separation of two metres between individuals is not possible or difficult. With growing evidence that masks operate as a barrier preventing those with COVID-19, including asymptomatic individuals, from spreading it to others, ensuring mask use is widely adopted will help to slow the spread of the virus while ensuring re-opening efforts continue.

Furthermore, the visual nature of masks act as a reminder that COVID-19 is still a risk, providing a visual cue for others that public-health measures such as physical distancing and good hand hygiene are still required.

“This is about protecting our entire community and ensuring we continue to limit transmission of COVID-19. While some people may feel COVID-19 isn’t prevalent in our community and that this by-law isn’t necessary, the reality is we can’t afford to take any steps back in fighting this virus,” said Mayor Walter Sendzik. “The wearing of masks will be a new normal for a period of time until we can safely open our entire economy and ensure the safety of our community. We can’t afford any setbacks – socially and economically. Our community continues to rise the challenges that we are facing, and I am proud of our citizens for all of their efforts to date.”

The by-law applies to all indoor spaces open to public, including City buildings, religious spaces and local businesses. There are some exceptions including day cares; schools; transportation; hospitals and health facilities; and Provincial and Federal government buildings.

There will also be certain instances where individuals will be permitted to remove their mask temporarily as required to receive services, eat or drink, receive medical care, and to participate in religious rites or ceremonies.

The City recognizes for a variety of reasons there will be certain individuals who cannot wear a mask. The by-law provides exemptions for:

- Children under 10 years of age
- Persons with medical conditions which prevent them from wearing a mask, including breathing difficulties and cognitive difficulties
- Individuals who are unable to apply or remove a mask without assistance
- Persons with protections, including reasonable accommodations, in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code that would prevent them from wearing a mask
- Persons assisting or accommodating another person with a hearing disability

Under the masks by-law operators of enclosed public spaces will be required to post signage stating the requirement of masks for entry, and develop policies surrounding implementation of requirements. Businesses must also provide hand sanitizer at entrances and exits. The City will be working to provide businesses with support, such as guides and sample signage, ahead of the by-law coming into effect.

Additionally, information will be provided to the public outlining proper mask use, and what constitutes an acceptable covering. For more information on the by-law visit www.stcatharines.ca/Masks.

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