

September 27, 2020

Mayor and Members of Council,

I wrote to the City Councillors back in July regarding the vote to mandate facial coverings and shared about my 12 years of experience working in a Dental Office, the last 8 of which I held position as Head of Infection Prevention and Control. If any are unaware, classified under health care settings, Dentistry operates under the same jurisdiction as hospitals when it comes to Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC). I shared with you my reasons, given my experience and knowledge of IPAC, as to why I believed that mandating masks would actually have the opposite effect than desired.

Unfortunately, I was proven correct in many of my concerns.

After more than 2 months now of mandatory face coverings indoors in the City of Hamilton, our cases of Covid-19 are now quickly rising. Ironically the case numbers began their second ascent shortly after facial coverings became mandated indoors in Hamilton.

Since masks have become mandatory, I regularly see people disregarding the 6 foot rule, often having strangers coming right up beside me. They seem to think it is a fix-all for everything and that they are now "Covid proof" by donning a mask so as to believe that physical distancing is no longer important. Most often, these masks are either a dirty mask they took out of their pocket/purse/bag or one that they have had sitting in their cars being used multiple times a day/week for weeks on end. In addition I see countless people wearing masks below their nose, or being handled/adjusted endlessly and then touching items in the store. I will not even get started on how disturbing it is to see how people manage their masks in a restaurant only to proceed to eating their food with the same hands, and the mask sitting beside their plate. Overall, there is no sense of IPAC!

Those who are strongly in favour of the wearing of masks can be trusted to follow protocol and handle their mask properly to reduce spread. However, now that everyone is wearing masks there is no way to know who is following proper protocol with masks and who are simply "getting by" with what is required of them to get indoors (which I fear, based on everything I've heard and seen over the last 2 months, seems to be the VAST majority as I suspected back in July when the minority of people were voluntarily wearing masks in public).

In addition, I shared with the council members that a single sneeze renders a mask useless as the moisture from the sneeze creates a direct pathway to the exterior of the mask by wicking it through the filter (disposable/surgical) or

material (cloth). How often I see people sneeze into their mask and not change it. Or wear the same mask all day which then gets moist from breath and wicks bacteria in and out of the mask. Or whose mask gets wet in the rain while walking to get indoors. Additionally as well, masks lose efficacy the longer they are worn, which all health care workers know. This is why best standards of practice for health care workers is to change masks every 1-1.5 hours or more frequently as needed. Most children at school and adults at work are wearing the same single mask all day.

I want to draw your attention to a statement that IPAC Canada made in regards to masks (<https://ipac-canada.org/pandemic-h1n1-resources.php>). While being sure to note that the first sentence is in relation to the H1N1 Flu, not Covid-19, the information in the following sentences on the use and improper use of PPE, in this case masks, is universal. It states:

*“There is no evidence to suggest that wearing masks will prevent the spread of infection in the general population. **Improper use of masks may in fact increase the risk of infection.** Masks do not act as an effective barrier against disease when they are worn for extended periods of time. In addition, removing your mask incorrectly can spread virus to your hands and face.”*

My second quote comes from Public Health Ontario in regards to Health Care Workers (HCW) use of PPE specific to Covid-19 (<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/updated-ipac-measures-covid-19.pdf?la=en>). It says,

*“Although the use of PPE controls are the most visible in the hierarchy of controls, PPE controls is the last tier in the hierarchy and should not be relied on as a stand-alone primary prevention program.....The health care organization plays a critical role in ensuring HCWs have access to appropriate PPE for the task to be performed and the necessary education and training to ensure competency on the appropriate selection, use and disposal of PPE to prevent exposure to infection.”*

While ideally everyone would practice perfect hygiene with their masks, the truth is that the vast majority do not care and see it as nothing more than a requirement to get into wherever they are wanting to go. This is a huge problem, and a huge threat to infection prevention and control as we see from IPAC Canada as well as PHO, which leaves little surprise that we are now seeing our numbers rising. Yes, face coverings are an easy reference point for us to draw our attention to as something that can help our problem. But what we don't see is

whose masks are actually helping the situation and whose masks are undoing all the work we've been doing all this time. As mentioned, PPE is always the last tier when it comes to IPAC but also proper education, training and follow-through on use are imperative to the success of using PPE effectively or else it can have the opposite consequences.

Mandatory face coverings have proven to be less effective than voluntary mask wearing as we've seen evidenced in our own city in the last two months. We want to believe the best and make laws in regards to the ideal but we have to deal with reality. Yes, ideally, everyone would be putting care into wearing masks properly. But also ideally, we wouldn't be dealing with Covid-19 in the first place. The reality though is that we are dealing with Covid-19 just as much as we are dealing with a majority of people who are entirely apathetic about proper care and use of face coverings other than knowing that without one on their face they cannot get into wherever they are wanting to go. Mandatory face coverings is putting us all at risk and as law makers you are responsible for changing these laws for the best interest of our whole city.

As we face another holiday where we will not be allowed to gather with loved ones, and with the possibility of another lockdown looming if numbers do not get under control, please consider the information provided in this delegation and vote to return to voluntary masking. Please strongly urge residents to wear masks but please vote against the mandatory masking as it is causing more harm than good.

Below I have included a copy of the email I originally sent to each of the Council Members back on July 10th. Thank you SO very much for your time and consideration, it is so very appreciated. All the best to you as you continue to make tough decisions on behalf of our city.

Sincerely,

Abbie Roberts of Mount Hope

On Friday, July 10, 2020, Abbie Roberts <[abbie.joy.roberts@gmail.com](mailto:abbie.joy.roberts@gmail.com)> wrote:  
Dear Hamilton City Councillors,

Today the City of Hamilton has voted to make mask wearing mandatory in all indoor public spaces. Having worked in a dental office for the last 12 years, being head of Infection Prevention and Control for the past 8 of those years, I urge you to consider the following information in your decision on whether to mandate masks or to keep it voluntary.

When it comes to masks there are some key points to be followed to make them effective in preventing the spread of infection. For starters, masks must be kept dry at all times. If one becomes wet or moist it must be discarded and thrown away or it is rendered useless as the droplets will flow through to the exterior of the mask making them spray outward from the outside of the mask by force when the wearer coughs or sneezes. Wetness/moistness can happen for various reasons, most often from the natural moisture that happens as a result of breathing. If worn long enough or in humid areas the mask will become damp or wet. Sneezing in a mask will also ruin the filter making it void after one moist sneeze.

Second, masks are only to be worn for one patient at one time. They are always to be discarded after use and a new one donned when seeing another patient.

Thirdly, masks are not to be touched anywhere other than the earloops, and only when putting on and taking off- any additional touching would contaminate the mask putting the wearer at risk of exposure to the patients germs and the patient exposure to the wearers germs. Touching the filter of the mask also ruins it and renders it useless and ineffective.

Unfortunately, the general public, while growing in their knowledge, are not versed in proper infection prevention and control practices. I see so many people wearing masks and gloves in their cars, wearing them either home or to other stores. May I ask- if you were at the dentist or doctors office and the practitioner walked in wearing mask and gloves they just wore for treatment on their previous patient- would you be okay with that or would you insist they change PPE and place fresh ones on for your appointment? I have no doubts that you would have some serious questions and concerns for your practitioner if that happened, and a practitioner who was found to be making a habit of such a practice would be fined by public health and disciplined by their regulatory body.

Wearing a mask and/or gloves from home to store to car to store to home is doing exactly that- transferring the bacteria from all those places like a dentist would be transferring germs if he or she did not change their PPE between patients or office activities. Wearing a disposable or reusable mask multiple places then bringing it home to wear on another day is spreading more germs than if you did not wear it at all. I also often see people wearing masks inside out...this does absolutely nothing for preventing droplets.

Fact is while a lot of people are passionate about wearing masks, majority are not. Those who are passionately against masks will avoid having to wear them and thus avoid indoor places as they refuse to wear them- these are not the people to be concerned about. People who are passionate about wearing masks will follow instructions diligently- these are not the people to be concerned about. It is the people who don't care either way, who will submit to the rules of wearing a mask as deemed necessary but give no care to the details of maintaining infection control practices with the mask. They are the ones who will keep their mask in the car to use over and over again when they go out- not caring what side they are putting it on because as long as they have one on they check the boxes of what is required to enter said public indoor space and no one will know any different if they are a firm believer or a "don't care but will do what is needed to get by". Personally, the majority of people I know fall into this category. Unless masks are being handed out at each store and disposed of on the way out, making masks mandatory will actually increase the risk of spread. As everyone in the space will be wearing a mask there is no way to know who is following proper procedure and who is simply "checking the box".

I urge the Councillors to reconsider their decision of mandating the use of masks in Hamilton. While it may alleviate the anxiety of a few and give them the feeling of safety, it is in fact not in the best interest of the public's health as it could actually increase the rate and likelihood of infection. If the final decision is made to mandate masks on July 17th, please insist that every store give free masks to their customers to be used in that store and mandated to be disposed of upon leaving that store. As we all know, we cannot afford another lockdown.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration, it is so greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Abbie Roberts

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~\*Abbie\*~