

Open Letter to Dr. Deena Hinshaw

January 25, 2021

Dr. Deena Hinshaw  
Alberta Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Edmonton, AB  
Deena.Hinshaw@gov.ab.ca

Dear Dr. Hinshaw,

I am writing this letter to ask that you rescind the province-wide mask mandate within CMOH Order 42-2020 which has no date of expiry, and in addition, that you remove the mask requirements within CMOH Order 33-2020 and guidance for schools, that came into effect at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. I believe that you acted in haste and without evidence of effectiveness or evidence of lack of harm when you passed these orders, and it is beyond time to re-assess. I also ask that you prohibit (or at least advise against) sports organizations implementing their own mandates which could result in serious harm (in particular to children and youth).

The Government of Alberta states on its website that “Wearing a homemade or non-medical mask in public is another tool to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.”<sup>1</sup> and constantly promotes the idea that wearing a mask protects others with posters claiming things such as “wearing a non-medical mask is an effective way to protect yourself and others”<sup>2</sup> and “You have the power to protect others. Wear a mask...”<sup>3</sup>, but inexplicably does not provide any supporting evidence for these claims. I have searched the relevant scientific literature extensively and have not been able to find any such evidence. In fact, as many cities/regions in our province (and around the world) have implemented orders/bylaws enforcing mandatory face coverings, cases have exploded. Masks are clearly not working to control the virus and may actually be increasing the spread and rates of illness. We are now almost a year into the pandemic and there has been ample time to research and evaluate evidence for (and impact of) the measures you are imposing. If you choose to continue to mandate children to wear masks in school and all citizens to wear masks in public, then I believe that you have a moral imperative to cite any/all of the scientific studies that provide the evidence - for the effectiveness of masks as well as for the lack of harm associated with them - that you are basing your decision upon. Without such evidence, you should never force something that may be harmful upon the population, and especially on children who are still developing and may suffer even greater harm from such measures. Although you made provisions in your order so that children would not be required to wear masks all day at school, many teachers/schools are nevertheless requiring this and believe they are doing so based on your advice. And while you also allow for exemptions and exceptions in your province-wide mandate, many businesses and citizens have decided that they will not accept those portions of the order and they discriminate against and even harass or bully those unable to wear masks. Additionally, even if the province-wide mandate is removed, please understand that many municipalities across the province are still mandating masks and they believe that they are doing so based on your advice. Even more alarming, sports organizations are implementing mandatory masking policies (including during exercise and competition) in order to try to appease the government and prompt them to allow their organizations to open up. Many of these organizations and municipalities do not have access to experts that can research and evaluate the evidence and they look to your words and messaging to provide guidance. I believe that these sports organizations do not understand the incredible risk of forcing children to wear masks during exercise, because the messaging you (along with AHS and the Alberta Government) provide on masks does not cover this risk. Sadly, the people most affected (the children and those unable to wear a mask), often do not have a strong voice, may not even have the relevant information, and thus are unable to advocate for themselves in this matter.

I understand that when you first implemented the order for schools, there was a (false) narrative out that there was “emerging evidence” to support widespread masking of asymptomatic individuals. However, this evidence never came. There is no good evidence in the scientific literature that masks reduce the spread of COVID-19 (or other respiratory viruses) in the community – on the contrary there is evidence that cloth masks may be worse than no mask at all (based on the only randomized controlled trial involving cloth masks<sup>4</sup>) and that medical mask use in the community does not provide a significant benefit against COVID-19 (based on the only randomized controlled trial of mask use for SARS-CoV-2<sup>5</sup>). Additionally, part of the “emerging evidence” narrative was that there was significant “asymptomatic spread” of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Likewise, this evidence never materialized. In fact, early and more recent evidence all suggests that there was/is little to no asymptomatic spread – the early data<sup>6</sup> showed a total of 29 reported cases in China (mostly household members, all with possible undetected symptomatic community transmission), 2 reported cases in Germany, and 10 cases in Singapore (again with possible undetected symptomatic community transmission), and the more recent studies show an estimated 0.7% household transmission rate from asymptomatic cases (which was not significantly different from zero at the 5% level of significance) in a review involving 54 studies including more than 77000 participants<sup>7</sup>, and zero transmission from 300 asymptomatic cases of almost 10 million residents tested in Wuhan, China<sup>8</sup>. Although there may be asymptomatic (and pre-symptomatic) infected individuals, just like previous respiratory viruses, SARS-CoV-2 is spread by viral particles emitted when (symptomatic) infected individuals cough or sneeze<sup>9</sup>. While there is no evidence of a benefit to widespread masking of asymptomatic individuals, there is an abundance of information<sup>10, 11, 12, 13, 14</sup> coming out about the potential harms (beyond the aforementioned study<sup>4</sup> that found the detrimental effect of increased respiratory infections with cloth masks).

I do not understand how mandatory health measures can be enacted by government and health officials without consulting with multiple experts and providing supporting evidence for such interventions. To my knowledge, the only expert that you have heard from on this topic (the potential benefits/harms of masks) is Chris Schaefer (Director of SafeCom Training Services Inc. in Edmonton) who clearly recommends against the use of face coverings for this or any other virus. In his open letter to you dated June 22, 2020, he indicated that neither cloth masks nor medical masks can provide protection against the virus, but that they can potentially result in serious harm. If you have information from other experts on the safety and/or effectiveness of masks, and in particular cloth masks, I ask that you make it available to the public.

In summary, there is no evidence for the effectiveness of face coverings in reducing the spread of COVID-19, there is evidence that cloth masks may increase the rate of respiratory disease, there is increasing evidence of harm (particularly to children) with prolonged use of face coverings, there are reports of serious harm including death following mask use during exercise, and the data indicates that mask mandates are not working – they are not reducing the spread in our communities. It is time to remove these ineffective and potentially harmful mandates, provide information on the effectiveness and harms of masks to the public, and then let people make their own decisions about whether they want to wear them.

Thank you,

Susan Budge, Ph.D.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.alberta.ca/masks.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> See figure, below.

<sup>3</sup> See figure, below.

<sup>4</sup> <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/5/4/e006577.full>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M20-6817>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7323549/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2774102>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-020-19802-w>

<sup>9</sup> Please see the attached letter from AHS (or the picture below from this letter) indicating that the virus is spread in respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.researchsquare.com/article/rs-124394/v1>

<sup>11</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00392-020-01704-y>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.sjweh.fi/show\\_abstract.php?abstract\\_id=2327](https://www.sjweh.fi/show_abstract.php?abstract_id=2327)

<sup>13</sup> <https://corona-transition.org/13-jahrige-maskentragerin-stirbt>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.thatsmags.com/china/post/31100/student-deaths-lead-schools-to-adjust-rules-on-masks-while-exercising>

COVID-19 INFORMATION

# MASKS ARE NOW MANDATORY

To help bend the curve and save lives, wearing a mask is now mandatory in all indoor public spaces and workplaces across Alberta.

Whether you're inside or outdoors, wearing a non-medical mask is an effective way to protect yourself and others when physical distancing may not be possible.

[alberta.ca/covid19](https://alberta.ca/covid19)

Alberta



Your Alberta (Government of Alberta)

January 14 at 10:30 AM · 🌐

You have the power to protect others. Wear a mask in all indoor public spaces, places of worship, and indoor workplaces.

Learn about the province-wide mandatory mask requirement and how to properly wear a mask at [alberta.ca/masks](https://alberta.ca/masks)



Contact Us



December 23, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians of students of **Ecole Champs Vallee**,

**RE: Notice of COVID-19 to Staff, Students and Visitors in Ecole Champs Vallee, 6002-30 Ave.**

Two or more cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed at **Ecole Champs Vallee, 6002-30 Ave.** As a result the Medical Officer of Health has declared a COVID-19 outbreak at **Ecole Champs Vallee**. Public Health staff are investigating to determine who may have been exposed at your school to cases of COVID-19 during their infectious period. **The virus is passed from person to person by large, respiratory droplets, like from a cough or sneeze. This means that a person would need to have direct contact with droplets from a sick person or surfaces that they have recently touched.** The risk of the general population in the school becoming infected because of these cases is low.