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## MEMORANDUM

CL-C 50-2020

**Subject: Public communications regarding facial coverings**

**Date: July 23, 2020**

**To: Board of Health/Regional Council**

**From: Meredith Maxwell, Manager, Public Health Communications & Engagement**

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Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Public Health has communicated with residents through several channels, both traditional and digital, about the risks of the virus and ways to prevent getting sick. In addition to physical distancing and hand-washing, Public Health has encouraged the proper wearing of face coverings when physical distancing is not possible.

This memo summarizes the communications strategy already in place by Public Health and is meant to inform the Regional Council discussion about the need for a marketing campaign to encourage residents to wear face coverings.

### Website

A COVID-19 webpage on the Niagara Region website was developed in mid-January, and has been promoted as “one stop shopping” for COVID-19 information. Given the evolving nature of the pandemic, staff have sometimes updated the site two times per day as new information becomes available. [Niagararegion.ca/covid19](https://niagararegion.ca/covid19) is a robust site with health statistics, FAQs, information for businesses and links to provincial and national health agencies.

There is also a dedicated page for face masks featuring the latest science, instructions for wearing masks and links to the Ministry of Health website with additional information. The following is a collection of website analytics from April 10 to July 10 from the COVID-19 landing page, FAQ and “Protect Yourself” page that contains information about face coverings.

<https://niagararegion.ca/health/covid-19/default.aspx>

- 609,910 - Page Views
- 436,756 - Page Visits

<https://www.niagararegion.ca/health/covid-19/faq.aspx>

- 18,563 - Page Views
- 14,409 - Page Visits

<https://niagararegion.ca/health/covid-19/protect-yourself.aspx>

- 11,139 - Page Views
- 8,402 - Page Visits

## **Social Media**

Niagara Region, Public Health and EMS have dedicated social media accounts, all sharing COVID-19 information specific to that channel's audience. For instance, the Niagara Parents Facebook page posts COVID-19 information aimed at parents who might be homeschooling their children, the REACT Instagram page posts COVID-19 information for teens, etc.

The following is a summary of digital engagement posts *specific* to face coverings, from April 10 to July 10.

### **Twitter – Niagara Region Public Health**

- 35 Tweets
- 147,947 Impressions
- 4,570 Engagements
- 3.08% Avg Engagement Rate per Tweet \*

\* For reference, an engagement rate of 3.08% is extremely high, especially for a government agency. In 2019, Niagara Region Public Health's average Twitter engagement rate was 0.97% (which is still high), and the average Twitter engagement rate across all industries is 0.045%.

## **Additionally**

- **36 Retweets of content posted by:**
  - @CPHO\_Canada, @ONTHHealth, @ONGov, @ChiefMacCulloch, @DMGLeg, @NiagaraRegion, @GovCanHealth, @OntarioHazards, @Lauralp, @NHBugBusterDoc, @MustafaHiri, @PattyHajdu, @NiagaraEMS, @NRPublicHealth
- Numerous '**Likes**' of tweets posted by local municipalities, local media interviews with Dr. Hirji and Dr. Feller, Ontario Public Health Units, government and international health agencies, and many other accounts (these show up in our followers newsfeeds "Niagara Region Public Health liked")

## **Facebook - Niagara Region**

- 16 - Posts
- 158,022 - Reach
- 181,594 - Impressions
- 1.55% - Avg Engagement Rate/Post (share, like, comment)
- 756 - Post Shares (shared on Niagara resident's Facebook profiles, as well as local businesses, organizations and municipalities Facebook pages)

In addition to these channels, face covering content has been shared on **both Dr. Hirji and Dr. Feller's Twitter, Niagara Parent's Twitter and Facebook page, Niagara Region Public Health's LinkedIn page, Niagara Region's YouTube channel and Twitter, REACT's Instagram, and the CASTLE Facebook pages.**

Over the past few months, social media toolkits with face covering messaging and images were created and provided to LAMs and partner organizations to be shared on their social media channels to further expand our reach.

## **Contents include:**

- How to wear a face covering, dispose/wash face covering, the 'do's' of wearing a face covering
- Who shouldn't wear a face covering, how not to wear a face covering, the 'do not's' of wearing a face covering
- When to wear a face covering (essential trips, when physical distancing is a challenge, on transit, at a march, in crowded places, etc.)
- How to make a face covering (sew and no-sew instructions)

- Where businesses can order PPE to protect employees and residents
- Included in steps to stay healthy, how to protect yourself and others, going outside, etc.
- Helping businesses reopen
- Stage 2 recommendations
- COVID-19 is still circulating / added measure / act of kindness

This infographic has been shared on our social media channels, our website, LAM and other stakeholder social media and published alongside a July 15 article in the St. Catharines Standard (see table below for link to article).

## HOW TO SAFELY WEAR A FACE COVERING



Wearing a face covering for essential trips, even if you have no symptoms, is an additional measure that you can take to protect others around you.

- ✓ Clean your hands before putting it on and taking it off
- ✓ Wash your cloth face covering in the laundry
- ✓ Make sure it fits. It should cover your mouth and nose.
- ✓ Continue to stay two metres (six feet) away from others
- ✓ Keep your hands away from your face while wearing a face covering
- ✓ Clean surfaces that a dirty face covering touches

**Save the medical-grade masks for health care professionals.**

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Info-Line 905-688-8248 press 7, then press 2 Toll-free: 1-888-505-6074

[niagararegion.ca/health](https://niagararegion.ca/health)

Niagara  Region

### Daily media interviews

Since mid-March, Dr. Hirji has participated in daily interviews with local, regional and national media. Given the consolidated media market in Niagara, a single article has the potential to reach residents across the region through the three daily papers in St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls, and weekly papers in other communities. These papers all have online and social media presence, which adds to the potential reach of the message.

Since June 1, Dr. Hirji has been directly and indirectly quoted in dozens of individual articles recommending people wear face masks when physical distancing is not

possible. As explained above, due to the consolidation of local media outlets, a true accounting of the number of these news stories is difficult to determine. For instance, a St. Catharines resident may read the same article in the St. Catharines Standard print edition, online edition and their local edition of Niagara This Week. Furthermore, radio interviews are often recorded and replayed throughout the day, the audio files are posted online and the interviews are summarized and written as a news articles online.

The following are several examples of media interviews where Dr. Hirji discussed the importance of face coverings.

Media outlet & date	Headline & link	Quote
<b>St. Catharines Standard</b>  <b>June 15</b>	<b>Hirji pushes possible masking order to municipal council</b>  <a href="https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/news/niagara-region/2020/06/15/hirji-pushes-possible-masking-order-to-municipal-councils.html">https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/news/niagara-region/2020/06/15/hirji-pushes-possible-masking-order-to-municipal-councils.html</a>	"...he remains concerned too many Niagara residents are no practicing effective infection control, including wearing masks..."
<b>St. Catharines Standard</b>  <b>June 26</b>	<b>First week of Niagara's reopening a mixed public health bag, says Hirji</b>  <a href="https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/news/niagara-region/2020/06/26/first-week-of-niagaras-reopening-a-mixed-public-health-bag-says-hirji.html">https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/news/niagara-region/2020/06/26/first-week-of-niagaras-reopening-a-mixed-public-health-bag-says-hirji.html</a>	"...that is why I am still harping on my same message of physical distancing, hand hygiene and masks when physical distancing is difficult"
<b>TVO</b>  <b>July 2</b>	<b>Who can – and should – make masks mandatory in Ontario</b>  <a href="https://www.tvonews.com/article/who-can-and-should-make-masks-mandatory-in-ontario">https://www.tvonews.com/article/who-can-and-should-make-masks-mandatory-in-ontario</a>	"The doctors also stress that masks are not a panacea but – along with handwashing and, most important physical distancing – pieces of the puzzle when it comes to reducing viral transmission"

Media outlet & date	Headline & link	Quote
<b>Thorold News</b>  <b>July 8</b>	<b>Social distancing more important than ever, top doctor says as Niagara re-opens</b>  <a href="https://www.thoroldnews.com/coronavirus-covid-19-local-news/social-distancing-more-important-than-ever-top-doctor-says-as-niagara-re-opens-2437297">https://www.thoroldnews.com/coronavirus-covid-19-local-news/social-distancing-more-important-than-ever-top-doctor-says-as-niagara-re-opens-2437297</a>	<p>“The way we got COVID-19 under control was the restrictions. When you lift them, you allow the virus to spread. That is why it is more important than ever to wash your hands, use a mask in crowded spaces and keep physical distance”</p>
<b>St. Catharines Standard</b>  <b>July 15</b>	<b>How to properly use your pandemic mask</b>  <a href="https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/news/niagara-region/2020/07/15/how-to-properly-use-your-pandemic-mask.html">https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/news/niagara-region/2020/07/15/how-to-properly-use-your-pandemic-mask.html</a>	<p>Regarded by Niagara’s acting medical officer of health as a secondary line of defence, when used in conjunction with handwashing and physical distancing, masks help reduce the transmission of the potentially deadly novel coronavirus.</p>

## Feedback loop

Resident feedback has been a critical part of the communications strategy for COVID-19. Staff monitor the resident inquiries received via email, social media and phone, and develop new communications as the need arises. For instance, as Niagara entered Stage 2 of reopening businesses, Public Health received questions about when to wear a face mask or a face shield. Within a week, we added information to our FAQ webpage and developed social media posts explaining the difference between these two types of facial protective equipment.

### **Other considerations**

In addition to the aforementioned communications that are specific to facial coverings, there are also billboards and bus ads across Niagara, all directing people to [niagararegion.ca/covid19](https://niagararegion.ca/covid19) for the most current information about the pandemic.

It is worth noting that Public Health is not the only agency communicating to Niagara residents about the importance of wearing masks. The Province of Ontario currently has a digital campaign running across social media channels, digital display ads on websites, and advertisements in print newspapers. If we were to develop a new marketing campaign that encourages residents to wear face coverings, our paid advertisement would potentially be placed alongside an interview with Dr. Hirji and an advertisement from the Province on the same topic, diminishing the incremental benefit. In a time of significant fiscal stressors on Niagara Region, Public Health wishes to be mindful of the incremental value of any taxpayer expenditure.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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