

P-05-998 Wearing of face masks/coverings to be mandatory in shops, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 06.09.20

Dear Members of the committee

Thank you for the opportunity to comment further on why I believe the mandatory use of facemasks/ face coverings in shops is a vital step forward in response to the continued threat of Covid 19.

I have outlined my concerns and some research points below for your consideration. I am available for further comment at any time.

- Masks are proving to be effective in reducing the viral load. If you catch Covid whilst wearing a mask you could get a lighter dose or version of Covid due to the reduced exposure a mask provides. Monica Gandhi, an infectious disease doctor at the University of California, San Francisco, says people wearing masks will take in fewer coronavirus particles, making it easier for their immune systems to cope. Link to research <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2020/07/418181/one-more-reason-wear-mask-youll-get-less-sick-covid-19>
- People who are continuing to shield because of a concern over people not wearing masks in shops may gain the confidence required to return to the retail environment which would then boost the economic outlook for retailers. This would also be a mental health benefit to those at risk individuals who may not have been out of the house for months.
- The benefit of a mandatory government led approach is that businesses would have a clear rule. The onus would not be on the retailer to decide policy and potentially create any customer issue about entry restrictions. Policing the mask rule in shops has been not been an issue in many other countries with the majority of people adopting this temporary measure as the new norm and a way to protect each other until a viable treatment/vaccine is available.
- The priority given to the NHS for mask supplies was obviously the right call during the peak. With the availability of face masks both single use and reusable now plentiful, cost effective and varied there is no reason to dissuade people from this further form of protection.
- An enclosed space is an enclosed space. The virus doesn't know if it is on a train or in a small shop. Many retail environments have narrow aisles which definitely provide less than social distance space for people to shop and despite the trust placed in shoppers to follow guidelines people do not always follow the rules. I have seen the discipline of many shoppers practically evaporate in the past month as people become board or fed up with the situation we find ourselves in. If risk of transmission is reduced by wearing a mask in these circumstances then surely it is worth doing.
- The advice of catching a cough or sneeze in a tissue is still put forward as an effective worthwhile thing to do to reduce transmission, surely a face covering does the same essential thing on a continuous basis if worn correctly?

- Face coverings are a way of further enhancing the protection of retail staff and by connection their families during the pandemic. Retail staff have either continued to work or returned to work sooner than many other professions during this pandemic. Often putting themselves at risk for minimum wage to ensure the supply of essential and non essential items to the public. It is unfair for staff to keep doing this in Wales without the best possible protection and vital to keep this infrastructure secure and safe. Many retail workers have families and the risk of bringing the virus home because of a non mandatory mask policy is both unfair and a cause for anxiety and mental health problems.

- As we move into the further loosening of restrictions we are also simultaneously approaching important milestones in the reopening of all parts of our society. Children will be returning to school, more people will be returning to workplaces after furlough and in turn using public transport, we are approaching flu season and all that entails. Face coverings in shops could provide a much needed level of further protection during these reopening test phases.

- Masks could help prevent the spread of other viruses that could be mistaken for Covid 19. Currently if you have any of the symptoms of Covid 19 you are advised to self isolate and get tested asap. This could also apply to the others in the household. Other viruses including flu could be mistaken for Covid 19 until tested potentially causing more disruption and harm. If face coverings reduce the transmission of other viruses with similar symptoms this could help keep more people safe and productive. This enhanced protection could also relieve pressure on the NHS during the winter months.

- Time delay factor. It is worse to wait until Covid cases rise before putting a mandatory mask order in place because of the potential of A symptomatic spread. Analysing data of an increase in cases means you are already potentially 10 - 14 days behind the virus. We need to be proactive instead of reactive.