



COVID-19 Update

Date	September 15, 2021
To	City Council
From	City Manager's Office
Service Area	City Manager's Office
Item No.	CM21-18

RECOMMENDATION

That City Council receive and file this report.

ISSUE

In response to rising COVID-19 cases across Saskatchewan and to help prevent transmission of the virus, the City of Regina (City) announced additional safety precautions for employees and the public on August 31, 2021. Decisions related to these additional safety precautions were made by the City Manager under the powers delegated in *Bylaw No. 2020-43, The COVID-19 Pandemic Amendment Bylaw, 2020*. The purpose of this report is to inform City Council of the decisions.

IMPACTS

Over the last 18 months, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in several adjustments to how the City delivers programs and services. When the Government of Saskatchewan's Public Health Order was lifted on July 11, 2021, the City also lifted restrictions.

Since July 11, 2021, City programs and services have been gradually resuming to pre-pandemic levels. Administration has also been working closely with medical health experts to monitor the situation and assess options to ensure the health and safety of employees and the community, and the continuity of City services. The City has partnered with the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) and community partners to encourage vaccination through earned media, Mayoral challenges

with Saskatoon, pop-up vaccination clinics at City facilities and the promotion of vaccination within our organization.

CONSULTATION WITH THE SASKATCHEWAN HEALTH AUTHORITY

The SHA is continually assessing the situation locally and is reviewing the research and actions undertaken by other provinces. Currently, Saskatchewan has the highest rate of cases per 100,000 population and the lowest vaccination rate in Canada. On August 26, 2021¹, the medical health officers across the province confirmed we are in the fourth wave and reinforced the core priority of vaccination. Based on science and data, they requested a number of public health measures be applied in Saskatchewan including:

- Mandatory masking for indoor public spaces until rates of transmission decline and immunization rates increase
- Mandatory vaccination for all health care workers, eligible students, parents, teachers, school staff, provincial and municipal employees
- Proof of vaccination (“vaccine passport”) or proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test to enter nightclubs, bars, restaurants, and other social and recreational events. Proof policies are also recommended for businesses serving large numbers of people indoors. Essential service providers can use other means to safely provide services to unimmunized clients such as cohorting, masks, physical distancing and hand hygiene

The SHA is closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation and, at this time, does not have a single set of thresholds or triggers for the Province to adopt province-wide directives. Some of the main data points being monitored include: number of new positive cases, number of hospitalizations, number of positive cases relative overall number of tests and RNA viral load in Regina waste water.

In late August, the SHA upgraded the risk in Regina from “*COVID transmission is controlled, but there is a risk of community transmission*” to “*high risk that COVID transmission is not controlled*”. On July 11, 2021 there were 77 cases in Regina and as September 12, 2021 there were 204 cases. Throughout the summer, daily case numbers have remained relatively stable with the average per day over a seven-day period gradually increasing from seven on July 11 to 19 on September 12. The RNA viral load in Regina’s waste water has stayed near the acceptable benchmark.

The situation in Regina is stable at the moment with the recognition that the local and provincial situation can change quickly as we have seen over the summer in Saskatoon and northern Saskatchewan.

¹ MHO Position Statement August 26, 2021, Dr. Cory Neudorf, Senior Medical Health Officer, Saskatchewan Health Authority

PROVINCIAL MEASURES ANNOUNCED ON SEPTEMBER 10, 2021

The Government of Saskatchewan announced the following measures to address the pressure facing the health system as a result of COVID-19:

- Mandatory Self-Isolation Order
- Expanding Health System Surge Capacity
- Expanding Health System Labour Mobility
- Expanding Contract Tracing Workforce
- Expanding COVID-19 Testing Options
- Booster Doses Availability
- Proof of Vaccination Requirement for Health Care Workers
- Verifiable Proof of Vaccination Record

The City has stated publicly that the proof of vaccination for public accessing City facilities would only be implemented when a QR code is available and accessible for the majority of residents 12 years of age and older. The QR code provides residents with a method of showing proof of vaccination while protecting personal health information.

Since the Saskatchewan Roughriders and the City announced proof of vaccination, eHealth Saskatchewan has been challenged to meet the demand of residents' requests to register for a *MySaskHealthRecord*. The record is needed to access the QR code when it becomes available.

The City is appreciative of the efforts of eHealth Saskatchewan and recognizes the concerns from residents about not being able to secure the QR code to access City facilities on September 20, 2021. Concerns from residents range from not having technology to not being able to access *MySaskHealthRecord* to ensuring exemptions are in place for children under 12, vulnerable populations and those who choose not to be vaccinated.

The City continues to be encouraged that the QR code is in its final stage of development and is expected to be launched the week of September 20, 2021. In addition to the availability of the QR code, the announcement of an app for businesses, organizations, post-secondary institutions and municipalities that will enable securely, scanning QR codes without retaining or viewing any personal health information is welcome.

Technical details related to both the QR code and the scanning app have yet to be released by the Government of Saskatchewan. The City is currently researching technology and preparing to ensure we are positioned to procure and implement the needed devices to ensure a positive experience for the public when accessing City facilities. The City will require a reasonable amount of time after receiving the technical details to ensure we have completed the appropriate due diligence.

Based on these considerations, the City is revising the target date for the public to provide proof of vaccination at City facilities to November 15, 2021.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Any policies implemented by the City will be subject to ongoing legal review to mitigate the risk of non-compliance with relevant provincial and federal laws.

In Saskatchewan, decisions about proof of vaccination in businesses, organizations, post-secondary institutions and municipalities are being left to the individual owner or governance board. In other provinces throughout Canada, these decisions are being made at the provincial level.

COVID-19 RECOVERY RESERVE

Through the Safe Re-Start Program, the federal government provided \$16.3 million of funds in 2020 to assist with the operating challenges and financial impact of the pandemic. The City drew \$418,000 in 2020 to cover COVID-19 costs related to the Council-approved Regina Economic Recovery Grant Program. The remaining \$15.9 million was transferred to the COVID-19 Recovery Reserve. The 2021 Budget was developed utilizing \$12 million of the COVID-19 Recovery Reserve to offset pandemic-related lost revenue in the areas of Transit & Paratransit Service, Traffic & Parking Revenue, Parks, Recreation & Culture and Amusement Tax. In addition to lost revenues, the budget also anticipated increased expenditures related to extra cleaning requirements and for the purchase of personal protective equipment (PPE) in 2021.

The actual revenues and costs incurred to date and the projected forecast at year-end indicate that the planned draw on the COVID-19 Recovery Reserve is on track with the budget and will be used to offset the COVID-19 financial impacts in 2021. As a result of this draw and other commitments against the reserve, the COVID-19 Recovery Reserve balance at year-end is currently projected to be approximately \$1.8 million.

There are sufficient funds in the Reserve to offset the projected operational costs to implement decisions associated with proof of vaccination policies.

COMMUNICATIONS

Since the City's announcement on August 31, 2021, we have received over 100 calls and emails and 66 service requests were created. The key themes include:

- Who pays for testing required and where/how to get it
- Clarification on mask requirements
- Residents concerned that they are not able to use facility, so want refund in taxes
- Residents not agreeing with decision to have a proof of vaccine mandate
- Residents not comfortable giving health information/privacy concerns

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the City has been committed to providing residents and employees with timely information on service and program adjustments, as well as encouraging our community and staff to follow public health guidance.

This information has been shared on Regina.ca/covid19, via radio and social media platforms including Twitter and Facebook. The City has also issued public service announcements and provided opportunities for media briefings.

Communication plans are being activated to ensure the public, employees and contractors are aware of the measures being taken and the actions required.

DISCUSSION

City Manager's Exercise of Delegated Authority

On April 15, 2020, City Council passed a resolution delegating specific authorities to the City Manager to make decisions to respond to COVID-19. In Saskatchewan, *The Cities Act* permits a council to delegate its powers or duties, with certain exceptions in the Act. These exceptions include the powers to make bylaws, the power to borrow money, lend money or guarantee the repayment of a loan and the power to move capital moneys to an operating budget.

Under the City Manager's delegated authority, the powers may only be exercised if reasonably required to respond to the emergency and, if used, Council must be notified as soon as reasonably possible. Council retains the right to cancel or amend any decisions made.

This report provides Council with the requisite notice of the City Manager's decisions in the exercise of this delegated authority. The decisions were made on August 30, 2021 and publicly announced on August 31, 2021 and included:

1. Starting Saturday, September 4, 2021 masks will be required when visiting indoor City facilities and while riding Regina Transit. This includes the Rider Transit shuttle service for Saskatchewan Roughrider games.
2. The City set a target date of Wednesday, September 15 to begin requiring proof of vaccination for our employees.
3. The City also indicated it was working towards requiring proof of vaccination for the public accessing indoor City facilities once the province had a QR code in place. The City set a target date of Monday, September 20 with the understanding the QR code would be in place by mid-September.

At the time of writing this report, the situation in Regina is stable with the recognition that the local and provincial situation can change quickly as we have seen over the summer in Saskatoon and northern Saskatchewan.

USE OF FACE MASKS WHEN VISITING INDOOR CITY FACILITIES AND ON REGINA TRANSIT

Since the Provincial Public Health Order was lifted on July 11, 2021, the City has encouraged members of the public entering our indoor facilities and riding Regina Transit to wear masks. We have continued to advise the public to stay home if sick and ask everyone to sanitize their hands when entering our buildings or taking transit. We have kept all plexiglass barriers in place for our employees serving the public and have continued with enhanced cleaning protocols.

On Saturday, September 4, masking requirements were implemented at all indoor City-owned facilities and on Regina Transit. The City's focus continues to be on educating and informing the public of COVID-19 safety precautions and on the use of face masks. Medical experts have noted that masks continue to be an effective way to limit the spread of COVID-19.

To date, compliance from members of the public has been very high. We have asked people to provide their own masks; however, in support of those experiencing financial barriers or those who may have forgotten, masks are available when needed.

Regina Transit

Signage has been updated on all buses requiring passengers to use a mask while on the bus. Masks were handed out to customers for the September 5 Rider Express and approximately 95 per cent of bus riders chose to wear a mask. The Transportation Service Officers have seen similar results on regular transit service. Masks are available at the Transit Information Center downtown for customers who may require a mask. Regina Transit has updated the external stop announcements and interior reader display boards have been updated to announce that masks are required on Transit buses. In addition, we have radio advertising in market that focuses on mask requirements for Regina Transit.

Indoor City-owned Facilities

Signage has been updated at all City facilities and is posted at all entrances, as well as internally throughout the facilities. The masking requirement extends to employees and members of the public. Contractors are also required to wear masks and have been advised of the requirement in City facilities. We have also worked closely with partners who operate buildings on behalf of the City to ensure they are implementing masking in a manner that is consistent with the City's approach. In buildings that are shared with other organizations, such as the māmawêyatitân centre or the Regina Public Library, Administration worked collaboratively to ensure the approach was as coordinated and consistent as possible based on the operational needs and decisions of the parties.

PROOF OF VACCINATION

The City is committed to the health and safety of its workplaces and to protecting its employees, staff, volunteers, interns, students and contractors from the hazards of COVID-19.

Our Employees, Staff, Interns, Students and Contractors

This commitment includes the responsibility to implement the necessary measures to protect employees, members of the public and visitors to City buildings, facilities or properties from known dangers. *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* and *The Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, 2020* also require the City to take reasonable precautions to maintain a safe working environment. This duty includes taking reasonable and justifiable measures to protect employees from the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

COVID-19 is a highly contagious communicable disease. It is critical that the City use all available tools at its disposal to ensure that its workplaces are as safe as possible. In that regard, federal and provincial health authorities have indicated that the COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada are, in combination with health and safety precautions, a safe and effective way to reduce the chances of acquiring and spreading COVID-19 in the workplace and to reduce the chances of individuals experiencing severe symptoms should they contract COVID-19. Individuals who are not vaccinated pose a greater risk to their personal health and safety and to the health and safety of those around them.

Because COVID-19 vaccines reduce these risks, the City strongly encourages all employees, contractors, volunteers, students and interns – other than any for whom it is not medically recommended – to obtain COVID-19 vaccinations at their first opportunity.

The City is in the final stages of developing a *Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Administrative Policy* to reduce the risks of COVID-19 in the workplace and to provide a safe environment for employees and the public to access and use City facilities. The policy has been developed in consultation with external legal counsel and every effort has been made to mitigate risk associated with *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* and *The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Senior leaders at the City will be informed of the policy beginning September 15, 2021. On September 14, 2021, our five unions and associations will be provided a copy of the policy for comment with a targeted implementation date of mid-October for our in-scope employees. City employees and contractors will be receiving further updates on the policy and what it means to them over the coming days and weeks.

City staff working inside Mosaic Stadium during Saskatchewan Roughrider games are expected to adhere to the Saskatchewan Roughriders requirements by either providing proof of vaccination or proof of a negative COVID test within 72 hours.

In addition to maintaining current health and safety precautions, such as personal protective equipment, physical distancing, frequent hand washing and hand sanitizing, frequent sanitization of high touch areas, etc., the *Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Administrative Policy* implements certain measures regarding COVID-19 vaccinations such that the risks of (a) acquiring and spreading COVID-19 in the workplace; and (b) experiencing severe symptoms of COVID-19 if contracted, are reduced.

Members of the Public and Volunteers Accessing City Facilities

As owner of Mosaic Stadium and REAL, the City is demonstrating community leadership by advancing proof of vaccination at all City facilities.

To ensure the successful implementation and a seamless experience for the public, the City is revising the target date to November 15, 2021. This target date remains contingent on the delivery of the QR code and app being provided by the Government of Saskatchewan. It also enables more residents to access eHealth Saskatchewan to set up their *MySaskHealthRecord* and to ensure residents know what to expect when visiting City facilities.

A policy with companion processes is under development and will be subject to legal review. Key policy tenants include:

- The City will offer choices to the public when we roll out proof of vaccination. The public will be able to show proof of vaccination and those who have not been vaccinated or do not wish to share their vaccination status can choose to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test instead. Alternatively, members of the public can choose to not visit indoor City facilities when the proof of vaccination requirement is in place.
- People may be granted an exemption to the requirement to provide proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test in a manner consistent with *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code, 2018* and other applicable law.

Operational impacts including technology requirements and staffing implications are actively being assessed. It is expected that at most facilities an additional person to complete the screening will be required; however, solutions are still being considered with all public facing facilities having vaccination status checked at point of entry. It is estimated the operational costs associated with activating proof of vaccination from November 15, 2021 until year end is \$250,000.

The City continues to focus on how to deliver programs to vulnerable populations as the masking and vaccination requirements come into effect. This includes working in partnership with the māmawêyatitân centre to direct participants directly to their program and minimize interaction with students and moving the food program to the entrance. We are also collaborating with external partners to identify where proof of vaccination exemptions may be required to ensure vulnerable community members can continue to access services that support community safety and well-being.

DECISION HISTORY

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, City Council considered *CM20-7 COVID-19 Update* on March 20, 2020 and approved the activation of the Emergency Operations Centre to respond to the crisis.

On April 15, 2020 City Council considered *CM20-8 COVID-19 Financial Update* and delegated additional powers to the City Manager during the state of emergency.

On April 29, 2020, City Council considered *CM20-11 The COVID-19 Pandemic Bylaw*, which delegated specific authorities related to a number of bylaws to the City Manager.

On May 27, 2020, City Council received *CM20-13 COVID-19 Update* which included information on COVID-19 related decisions made by the City Manager through delegated authority and an update on the Municipal Economic Enhancement Program funding announcement.

City Council received *CM20-20 COVID-19 Update* at the June 30, 2020 Council meeting which covered the re-open plans for the City of Regina.

On July 29, 2020, City Council approved *CR20-68 COVID19-Response - Property Tax Relief* which established the Economic Grant Recovery Program to provide financial support for local businesses.

A Notice of *Motion MN20-22 Mandatory Masks* was tabled and considered at the August 26, 2020 Council meeting which led to the generation of *CM20-30 COVID-19 Update: Motion MN20-22 Mandatory Masks* that was tabled on September 30, 2020.

CM20-30 COVID-19 Update was on the agenda of the September 30, 2020 City Council meeting and was considered by Council on October 6, 2020.

CM20-34 COVID-19 Update was provided to Council on December 2, 2020. The report was informational and outlined the status of impacted services, an overview of the financial support provided through the Economic Recovery Grant and how services were mobilized to support vulnerable individuals.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "C. Holden".

Chris Holden
City Manager