

[Local News](#)

'I exempt myself:' Protesters march against mandatory masks

Joanne Laucius

Jul 19, 2020 • Last Updated 14 hours ago • 2 minute read



A group gathered at city hall to participate in the March To Unmask in Ottawa on Sunday, July 19, 2020. ASHLEY FRASER / Postmedia

TRENDING

About 60 people gathered outside Ottawa City Hall on Sunday for an event called March to Unmask.

Some were skeptical about the evidence for making masks mandatory in indoor public spaces. Some argued that it's a human rights issue. Others were skeptical of government in general.



None wore masks and some carried placards with messages like “Hugs Over Masks” and “I Exempt Myself.”

The march was one of 16 slated to be held in cities across Canada on Sunday.

MORE ON THIS TOPIC

[Canadians are reluctantly wearing masks as support for mandatory masking climbs](#)

Tania Khazaal said the issue is one of choice as far as she’s concerned.

“From the very beginning, I have never worn a mask. I have always questioned the system.”

Khazaal said she is careful to wash her hands and observe other COVID-19 prevention measures. People touch their faces more often when they wear a mask, she said.

“If this was a crucial health issue, it would come down from the federal or provincial government. But it hasn’t,” she said.

“I feel we have to stand up for our rights,” said Kingston resident Jane Dauncey. She argues that while some people can claim an exemption for wearing a mask for medical reasons, employees can’t refuse.

“People feel that they’re lucky just to have jobs.”

A number of groups and websites have sprung up around the masks issue, including Stand Up, The Line and Hugs Before Masks and Mothers Against Distancing.



A group gathered at city hall to participate in the March To Unmask in Ottawa on Sunday, July 19, 2020. ASHLEY FRASER/Postmedia

Miranda Remillard, one of the organizers of the Ottawa event, is among the people “occupying” the area around the National War Memorial in tents.

“We have been demanding that all politicians step down,” she said. “We need a new government that is for the people, by the people.”

Under Ottawa Public Health guidelines, some people are exempt from wearing masks, including children under two, children under five who refuse to wear a mask and can’t be persuaded by their caregiver, people with medical conditions such as breathing difficulties and those who can’t remove a mask without help.

Someone who is deaf or hard of hearing may also require an employee to remove their mask.

Those who are exempt are not required to provide proof of exemption and they should not be turned away from indoor public spaces if they are unable to wear a mask, said Ottawa Public Health.



A group gathered at city hall to participate in the March To Unmask in Ottawa on Sunday, July 19, 2020. ASHLEY FRASER/Postmedia

Some groups that object to masks have been offering official-looking “medical exemption” cards, which include a phone number to report a “violation of disability rights.”

While the phone number on the cards belongs to the Canadian Rights Commission, the cards are fake and the human rights commission recommends that Canadians don’t share or use them, said spokeswoman Véronique Robitaille.

“Being required to wear a mask does not violate your human rights when public health is at stake,” said Robitaille.

“If you can’t wear a mask for a reason that is protected by human rights law, such as a disability, you may be able to ask your employer or service provider to accommodate you. However, if that accommodation will put others at risk, it may not be possible. If a person feels that they have been discriminated against, they can file a complaint with the appropriate federal/provincial or territorial commission.”



A group gathered at city hall to participate in the March To Unmask in Ottawa on Sunday, July 19, 2020. ASHLEY FRASER/Postmedia



A group gathered at city hall to participate in the March To Unmask in Ottawa on Sunday, July 19, 2020. ASHLEY FRASER/Postmedia



Ottawa Citizen Headline News

Sign up to receive daily headline news from Ottawa Citizen, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.



Email Address

youremail@email.com

Sign Up

By clicking on the sign up button you consent to receive the above newsletter from Postmedia Network Inc. You may unsubscribe any time by clicking on the unsubscribe link at the bottom of our emails. Postmedia Network Inc. | 365 Bloor Street East, Toronto, Ontario, M4W 3L4 | 416-383-2300

TRENDING

- 1 **Should students and teachers be required to wear masks at Ontario schools this fall?**
- 2 **Canadian Forces 'information operations' pandemic campaign squashed after details revealed to top general**
- 3 **Swimming not recommended at Ottawa's four available public beaches**
 with Video
- 4 **Leaky border: Tourists and quarantine cheats threaten Canada amid U.S. COVID-19 surge**
- 5 **'One of the happiest days of our lives:' 500 march to support Almonte woman**
 with Video

THIS WEEK IN FLYERS

COMMENTS

Postmedia is committed to maintaining a lively but civil forum for discussion and encourage all readers to share their views on our articles. Comments may take up to an hour for moderation before appearing on the site. We ask you to keep your comments relevant and respectful. We have enabled email notifications—you will now receive an email if you receive a reply to your comment, there is an update to a comment thread you follow or if a user you follow comments. Visit our [Community Guidelines](#) for more information and details on how to adjust your [email](#) settings.

NewsReopening CanadaOpinion
SportsArtsLifeBusiness

Follow the
Ottawa Citizen



Advertise With UsDigital Ad RegistrySite MapContactPrivacy - UpdatedTerms of UseCopyright

365 Bloor Street East, Toronto, Ontario, M4W 3L4

© 2020 Ottawa Citizen, a division of Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.