Côte-St-Luc makes masks mandatory in stores, city buildings

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It's now mandatory to wear a mask while shopping in Côte-St-Luc.

"We want to make Côte-St-Luc the safest place to shop," Mayor Mitchell Brownstein said.

The bylaw, adopted Monday, also applies to entering city buildings. The mayor said businesses have two weeks to come up with a plan to inform customers of the new rule and to put measures in place to enforce it. Lapses in enforcement will be tolerated until the end of June.

"Hopefully by July 1 everybody will be used to the new normal," Brownstein said.

Côte-St-Luc was one of the first COVID-19 hot spots on the island of Montreal.

Seniors account for 30 per cent of Côte-St-Luc's population of 32,448, and hundreds of them spend the winter in warmer climates outside of Canada. In mid-March, Brownstein declared a state of emergency in anticipation of a possible surge of COVID-19 infections following their return.

Two days later, Brownstein made a public appeal for snowbirds to self-isolate for 14 days, after receiving complaints from citizens who had observed recently returned snowbirds circulating freely. By March 27, more than 42 per cent of Montreal's COVID-19 infections were in Côte-St-Luc and the adjacent borough of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce — Côte-des-Neiges, and Quebec public health director Horacio Arruda was warning people to stay away from the area.

The situation has improved, but Côte-St-Luc's infection rate of 1,522.4 per 100,000 remains above the island-wide average of 1,241.8.

The IGA grocery chain has two stores in Côte-St-Luc. Anne-Hélène Lavoie, a spokesperson for parent company Sobeys, said employees have been wearing masks for a while now.

When asked how the stores will enforce the new bylaw, Lavoie said they were still figuring that out.

Brownstein said Côte-St-Luc is following the lead of countries including Japan and Israel that have rigorous, mandatory mask measures in place.

"They are doing so much better than us in terms of infection rates," Brownstein said. "Masks work. I want the economy to open up well."

Quebec Premier François Legault and Arruda have yet to declare masks mandatory throughout the province. Instead, they strongly encourage wearing a mask when physical distancing is difficult to maintain.

During his Tuesday briefing, Legault was again asked about imposing the mandatory use of masks. He said Arruda, who did not attend the briefing, would be the one to make that sort of decision.

Brownstein said the bylaw is about educating, not imposing fines. However, businesses that do not enforce the law could be hit with fines of $100-$500.

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