



## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

### SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Mr Alistair Coe MLA (Chair), Ms Tara Cheyne MLA (Deputy Chair), Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA,  
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA

### Select Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic Response QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked by Ms Tara Cheyne on 1 May 2020

In relation to:

I understand that personal protective equipment, like surgical masks and N95 masks, should be reserved for health professionals and other sectors with the greatest need, rather than used by the general public - this question does not contest that. However, there has been a considerable uptake of wearing cloth masks around the world, including in the USA, Germany, France, India and Brazil.

1. Why is Australia and the ACT taking a different approach?
2. COVID19 can be asymptomatic. While people who are asymptomatic may have smaller viralloads, would it not at least be sensible to increase the wearing of cloths masks by everyone in public - as part of the broader health care regime of washing hands etc - as restrictions ease and people are coming into more and closer physical contact with each other?

Ms Stephen-Smith: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:-

1. The Infection Control Expert Group are advising the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) on infection control issues.

The latest advice is that the use of non-medical face coverings in the community is only helpful in preventing people who have coronavirus infection from spreading it to others. There is little evidence supporting the widespread use of masks in healthy people to prevent transmission of COVID-19 in public.

Importantly, wearing a non-medical face mask can detract from the more effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including physical distancing and hand hygiene, by providing a false sense of security. Wearing a non-medical face mask can lead to increased risk of contamination of a person's face, if they touch the mask to readjust it.

2. There is insufficient evidence to support the wearing of non-medical masks to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and there are concerns that wearing a mask may lead to more harm than good; for example, by detracting from proven measures to prevent transmission (including hand washing and physical distancing) and increasing the risk of contamination through people touching their face when adjusting their mask.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic response

Signature:



Date:

20/5/20

By the Minister for Health, Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA