



THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF PORT OF SPAIN

Health, Safety and Environment Team

c/o Archbishop's House, 27 Maraval Road, Port of Spain

**UPDATE
ON
COVID-19
TRANSMISSION PREVENTION
MEASURES**

BULLETIN #28

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THE MASK DEBATE

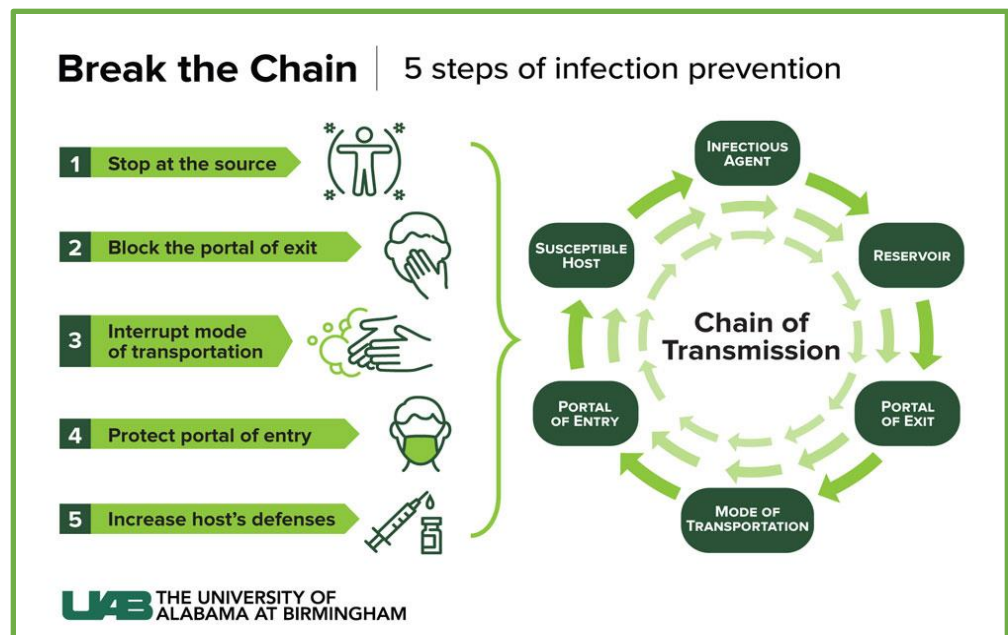
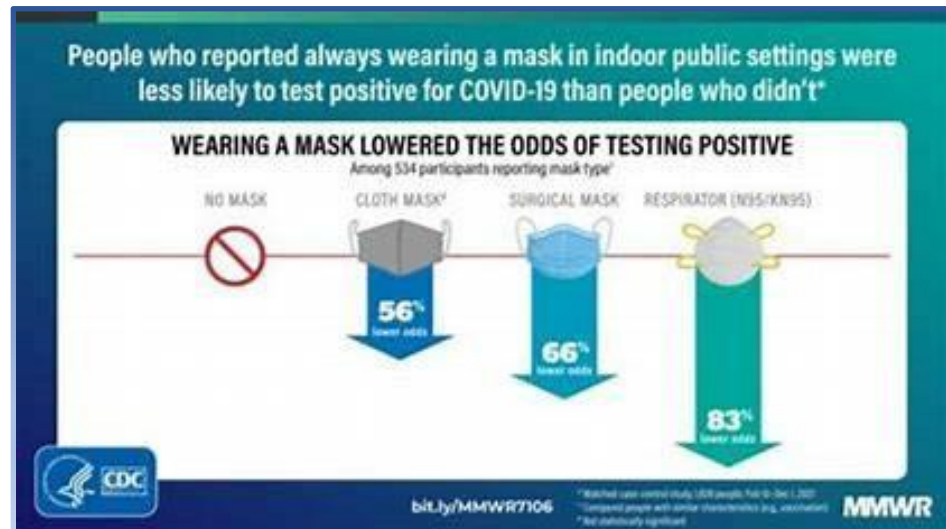
Within recent times there has been some debate about the matter of what some people term as “*The Catholic Church in T&T maintaining a mask mandate in our Church buildings and our Catholic Schools.*” In this Bulletin we address the issue and provide you with some guidance to assist you in making wise and informed decisions on this matter.

Let us start with some facts:

- At present, there is no mandate in place that masks must be worn in our Church buildings and schools.
- The policy of the Church is that it is not compulsory to wear masks, but it is highly recommended do so.
- Medical experts, both local and international, concur that COVID-19 still exists and that care should be exercised, especially when indoors, in a poorly ventilated space and where people are in close proximity for more than 15minutes e.g. in a classroom or office.
- Precautions include wearing a well-fitted mask, practising good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene, facilitating adequate ventilation and getting vaccinated. On its own, no one intervention will prevent transmission.

What does the Science say?

Here are two recent slides that are rather telling:



- Consistent use of a good-quality, well-fitted face mask reduces the risk of contracting SARS-CoV-2, influenza and other respiratory viruses.

- Each time that the SARS-CoV-2 passes from one individual to another is an opportunity for the virus to outsmart our body's immune system making it more easily transmissible.
- The toolbox of COVID-19 transmission mitigation measures complements each other. No one intervention on its own will prevent exposure and avoid illness.

How do we interpret what the Science says?

- The findings from recent studies show that where wearing of masks was discontinued significantly, the instances of transmission were higher than in those places where the wearing of masks was maintained to a large extent.
- As we see it, there has been a paradigm shift. Formerly, we asked people to wear masks for the sake of the vulnerable. Now we ask those who are vulnerable to wear a mask to protect themselves. This imposes on us all, a responsibility to choose wisely.
- It is on these scientific findings that the HSE Team has maintained its position of recommending that we continue to wear masks.

Some suggestions for Schools

- We concur with the policy of the Ministry of Education which states: "It is not compulsory to wear a mask at school, but we highly recommend it."
- Masks are unnecessary when students are outdoors.
- Where **possible and practical**, some classes should be held outdoors.
- An age-appropriate health promotion campaign is required to effectively communicate healthy behaviours e.g. stay at home when ill, cover your mouth when you cough, sneeze into your elbow, wash your hands regularly.

- Adults should consistently model healthy behaviours before their students.

Conclusion

- No one will be denied entry into our Church buildings or schools if he/she is not wearing a mask.
- All who wish to wear masks are free to do so.

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