

November 22, 2022

Gordon Swaters  
President, Association of Academic Staff University of Alberta  
Email: [gordon.swaters@uasua.ca](mailto:gordon.swaters@uasua.ca)

Dear Gordon,

On behalf of University of Alberta's Senior Leadership Team and Public Health Response Team (PHRT), I am writing in response to your November 19 letter and the two motions on masking adopted by AASUA members at your AGM last week. The AASUA and our academic staff are important partners in maintaining the public health of our community. We value your attention, support and involvement in encouraging personal health and safety measures -- and mask use as one of those measures -- that can help curb viral illnesses on our campuses this season.

On public health matters, the U of A follows evidence-based research and public health expert and authority guidance for Alberta. Through the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) for the Edmonton Region, the PHRT monitors the public health situation in our communities, and most recently the early rise in seasonal infections in Alberta such as influenza, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and COVID-19. The MOH has been directly advising the PHRT to ensure we have the best possible scientific and medical information. Sweeping public health restrictions are not a first line of defence; they are rarely used outside of States of Emergency due to the negative or unknown effects they can have in minority settings or on an individual's holistic health. For the U of A community, minimizing risks to public health has always depended on the active participation of those working, living and learning within the many diverse environments across our campuses.

To the first motion, we are following public health expert guidance and are not implementing a mask mandate on U of A campuses. We continue to take a layered safety measure approach with an emphasis on staying home when ill and vaccination. Face masks are strongly recommended on U of A properties, especially in instructional spaces, indoor high-traffic and high-capacity areas, as outlined in our [personal health measures](#) as well as our [COVID-19 safety measures](#). Mindful of the early rise in seasonal infections in Alberta this year, we will be taking further steps in November and December to achieve increased public health precaution ([the HealthyU Essentials](#)) awareness and uptake for the U of A campus community, including increased mask use. We all want to keep our community as healthy as can be achieved throughout exams, the holiday season and into the new year. Added efforts will include:

- Increasing proactive public health engagement efforts directed to students, faculty, staff and visitors, including an emphasis on the benefits and recommended mask use, as well as vaccinations, practicing good hygiene and staying home when unwell.
- Increasing free mask [availability](#) (particularly during examinations) and having more visible placement of masks on our campuses.
- Ensuring that students, faculty and staff, continue to balance their health, work and their studies. It will continue to be very important that students who feel unwell and are unable to attend class are provided with the proper accommodations for their circumstances.
- Further promoting access to influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations available to students, faculty and staff both on U of A campuses and in the greater community.



To the second motion, in line with public health guidance for the province of Alberta and cities of Edmonton and Camrose, the university lifted its mask mandate on March 16, 2022. We recognize, appreciate and share the AASUA's desire for transparent, evidence-based information. We will continue to rely on direction from the Chief Medical Officer of Health as well as advice from the MOH for the Edmonton Region and other subject matter experts from the College of Health Sciences to underpin PHRT decision making. As possible and needed, we will increase our institutional efforts to inform our community of the available evidence and public health data behind public health decisions this season. I would be pleased to re-commence regular public health information sharing sessions directly with our employee associations and student unions representatives to ensure the latest U of A information is readily available to your team as well. Please let my office know if that is desired.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide additional information to the AASUA on these matters of concern to some members of our academic staff.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrew Sharman".

**Andrew Sharman, MSc, CMILT**

Executive Lead, Public Health Response Team  
Vice-President (Facilities and Operations)

cc: Kate Chisholm, Board Chair, University of Alberta  
Bill Flanagan, President and Vice-Chancellor  
Verna Yiu, Interim Provost and Vice-President (Academic)  
Todd Gilchrist, Vice-President (University Services and Finance)  
Jillian Pratt, President, Non-Academic Staff Association  
Abner Monteiro, President, Students' Union  
Anas Fassih, President, Graduate Students' Association  
Qutuba Karwi, President, Postdoctoral Fellows Association