



End of mask mandate in Quebec high school classes leaves many 'a bit puzzled'

Pediatrician Dr. Olivier Drouin wishes Quebec would have waited to lift the measure, warning the risks could outweigh the benefits.

Jesse Feith • Montreal Gazette
Nov 02, 2021 • 20 hours ago • 3 minute read • [14 Comments](#)



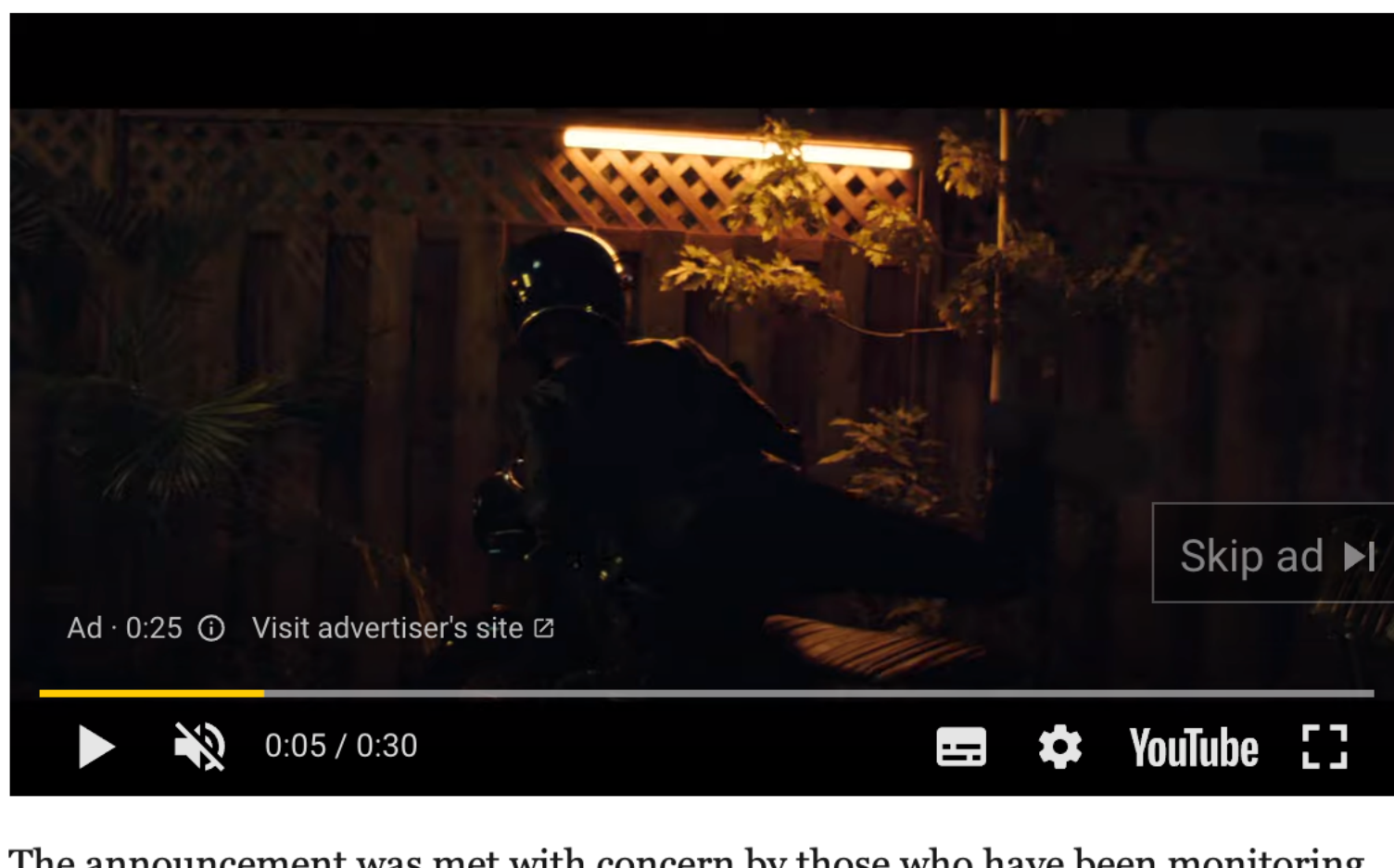
Some experts and school workers are questioning why Quebec has announced masks will no longer be required in classrooms as of Nov. 15, instead of waiting until younger children can be vaccinated. PHOTO BY ALLEN MCINNIS /Montreal Gazette files

With COVID-19 vaccination rates high among teenagers across the province, Quebec announced Tuesday high school students will soon no longer need to wear masks while in class.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

The change will come into effect on Nov. 15 and only apply to the classroom. Masks will still be required during school transport and in common areas.



The announcement was met with concern by those who have been monitoring the situation in schools, with some questioning why the province would rush to remove a measure that seems to be working.

“I’m a bit puzzled, to be honest,” said Dr. Olivier Drouin, a pediatrician at Montreal’s Ste-Justine Hospital. “It will be more pleasant for teenagers, but I think that small benefit doesn’t outweigh the potential risk to the teenagers themselves and, mostly, other family members.”

Quebec Health Minister Christian Dubé announced the change on Tuesday during a news conference about the [easing of several other measures in two weeks](#). Dubé said the changes are possible given that Quebec’s “epidemiological situation is relatively under control.”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

Asked about the change in classrooms, Quebec public health director Horacio Arruda said he feels it’s the right move since there haven’t been many cases recorded in high schools. The vaccination coverage is also high among 12- to 17-year-olds in Quebec, he noted.

“When we balanced the effects of having the mask on all day long in the classroom, in relation with the fact that we didn’t have any outbreaks at that level, we think it’s acceptable to take away the masks,” Arruda explained.

But given how many high school students have younger siblings, Drouin and others questioned why the province would make the change now instead of waiting [until younger children can be vaccinated](#).

“What’s the harm in continuing to wear the mask (for now)?” Drouin asked.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

“Teenagers are used to it — it’s been the norm since the beginning of the school year,” he added. “So I don’t really understand the rush. We could have easily waited until after the holidays, to see how the fall goes, see how vaccinating the five- to 11-year-olds goes and reassess then.”

Vaccination rates are strong among high school students in Quebec. Among the 12-to-17 age group, 94 per cent have received one dose and 86 per cent are fully vaccinated. But vaccination coverage among teens is significantly lower in certain areas, including different neighbourhoods in Montreal.

As of Tuesday, according to Montreal public health, coverage in the age group was still under 65 per cent in several boroughs. In Outremont, where it’s lowest, only 56 per cent of 12- to 17-year-olds are adequately vaccinated.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

Reached for comment on Tuesday, Mike Cohen, a spokesperson for the English Montreal School Board, said the board will follow the measures put forward by the government.

But Cohen said he spent the day speaking with teachers and got mixed opinions on the announcement, especially since it [comes as flu season arrives](#).

“Some teachers are fine with it, but there are others who have a level of discomfort and concern,” Cohen said.

Neil Yetman, the president of the Quebec Province’s Association of Teachers, asked why the province isn’terring on the side of caution.

“I don’t know where this is coming from at all,” Yetman said. “We have very few cases in high school right now, which is great. So why are we changing something that seems to be working?”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

Before the school year began, Quebec had announced in June that students would not be wearing masks this year.

As the pandemic’s fourth wave gained steam, however, the [government backtracked on its position](#) and implemented the measure in nine regions across the province.

jfeith@postmedia.com

MORE ON THIS TOPIC



COVID-19 updates: Quebec to ease school mask rules.



Patrons and staff toast relaxed rules for Quebec bars