

What Wave?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

I keep hearing about an alleged sixth wave pummelling Ontario but I don't see any evidence of it. I've seen plenty of evidence to the contrary, from large, in-person events and celebrations where most remain maskless, to video clips from stadiums full of people cheering on their favourite teams - also maskless. I watch news reports from the head of the science table, Dr. Peter Juni, strongly suggesting it would be prudent to wear a mask at indoor locations where lots of people are gathered and then I see first-hand how so many of us have dropped this simple piece of protective cloth and are living life without a care in the world. Is there a sixth wave? What should we do about the sixth wave? What wave?

In conversations with friends and business associates, the common refrain is, 'it's a complicated situation.' We know that so many of us are eager to resume 'real life.' We want to gather with friends and family and we don't want to have to run back to the car to grab the mask we invariably forgot there. Nicer weather is coming and patio season is something to look forward to but if I also understand, and Dr. Moore finally emerged from hiding (in the Caribbean apparently) to confirm it, we are indeed the midst of another wave.

In my humble opinion, it could have been an entirely different wave with much of the illness we are seeing now completely preventable for the sake of a simple mask.

Perhaps I'm the simple one because I truly don't get it.

I simply don't understand how wearing a mask has become such an enormous and polarizing force. Plenty of people have commented that it's the messaging that was all wrong from the beginning; that mask wearing should have been about 'prevention,' not 'restriction.'

Perhaps they're right, but I suppose I also naively believed in the concept of community spirit - that no matter what the messaging was - surely we'd all agree that wearing a mask was for the greater good? I suppose, too, that I also believed in common sense and to me, that meant simple logic should dictate wearing a mask, especially in schools, for at least several more weeks after March Break when people had travelled and met with friends, just made sense. You would think at my advanced age I would know better by now.

The good doctors and epidemiologists, Public Health Ontario and others who sit at the Science Table have all recommended the return of a mask mandate but we saw on Monday what Dr. Moore thinks of that. Roundly rejected in one sentence, while also acknowledging that the BA.2 variant is circulating widely and will continue to do so for at least several more weeks, he then urged Ontarians to consider wearing a mask in public and in crowded indoor spaces AND then, horribly, acknowledged the deaths of children from COVID in these last few weeks as contributable to comorbidities.

So, to summarize - yes we are in a 6th wave, no masks aren't mandated, yes you should wear a mask and no, kids aren't dying from COVID but from some 'other' problem they already had, but were apparently living with just fine before COVID.

Does anyone other than me have a problem with this? Did anyone other than me read this fascinating fact recently, 'the proportion of samples identified as BA.2 rose from 12.3% the week of February 13 to 54% the week of March 13? In other words, this variant is spreading exponentially at an alarming rate. Masks might not stop all of the spread but I'm pretty darn sure masks could help slow it significantly.

You know what else might have helped to slow the spread? Easy - and early - access to rapid tests. I know, I know, 'here she goes,' but you didn't think I'd write a whole article without mentioning the breaking news that our Premier distributed for free (read, taxpayer funded) rapid tests to private schools en masse well before he ever sent them to the schools (read, taxpayer funded) that the

rest of us attend. When we did get them, we were allocated a resounding two per child. Have we already forgotten the early morning line-ups at LCBOs of all places, to receive a box of five? How short are our collective memories that while rapid tests are now (and finally) readily available, we are prepared to forget that mere weeks ago we were lining up for them all while those amongst us who can afford to pay exorbitant fees to send their children to private school were being given full boxes for free?

At least the good news is we now have access to rapid tests that will prove we are indeed in the middle of a sixth wave. Virtually everyone I know at this point, even the most cautious amongst us, has experienced or know someone who has experienced COVID. Whatever this latest variant is called it's significantly more transmissible and while it might be mild for you, there are health care workers still struggling on the front lines every day who will assure you it's not mild for everyone. You know what might have helped prevent such easy transmission? A mask. A few weeks ago I asked everyone to be kind regardless of the choice to wear or not wear one. Today, if YOU believe there is a sixth wave, I'm simply asking you to re-consider wearing one while you grocery shop or intermingle in public spaces. In other words, I'm still asking you to be kind. In the annals of history are we really willing to be nothing but a footnote that acknowledges our demise arose from the refusal to wear a simple piece of protective cloth?