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UTFA's Response to the Administration's Suspension of the Mask Mandate

June 30, 2022

Dear UTFA Colleagues,

Three weeks ago, the senior Administration announced that it would be discontinuing the University's mask mandate today, June 30, 2022. UTFA has been hearing from many faculty members and librarians who are concerned about this change. We also recognize that some UTFA members support the decision.

As we begin the summer season, it seems probable that we are entering into another dangerous wave associated with Omicron variants. Wastewater signals in the GTA are currently rising, and studies are emerging that show that the impact of repeated COVID-19 infections can be cumulative rather than diminishing. The increasingly well-documented threat of 'long COVID' is particularly worrisome.

UTFA's position on masking continues to be guided by our commitments to, and advocacy for, key principles: respect for science; the precautionary principle; and best practices in health and safety that exceed legislated minimum standards. Based on the advice we have received from leading indoor air quality and public health scientists, UTFA has responded to the Administration's announcement by calling for an extension of the University's mask mandate. Specifically, we are advocating that the Administration require all University community members to wear well-fitting, high-quality masks.

We regret that the University Administration does not appear to have taken the advice of its leading scientists into account when making the decision to remove the protection that mask mandates provide. Transforming the decision about whether to wear a mask from a universal requirement into an individual choice is in our view an ineffective public health strategy because we share the air in common—including airborne pathogens.

UTFA is very concerned about the potential health impacts of lifting the mask mandate, including the risk of increased infections and reinfections on campus. UTFA is also concerned that the lifting of the mask requirement will make it more difficult for the more vulnerable amongst us (e.g., those who are

immunocompromised) to attend in-person activities on campus.

Moving Forward

UTFA will continue to engage in collegial discussions with the Administration and to advocate in a principled manner.

We call on the Administration to follow in the footsteps of Ontario hospitals, and to extend the University's mask requirement throughout the summer, and into the fall as appropriate. UTFA believes an extension of universal masking would enable a safer return to in-person work, which is in the interests of the entire University community.

UTFA will continue to provide you with updates as they become available.

Sincerely,

Terezia Zorić
UTFA President

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UTFA VP, Salary, Benefits, Pensions, & Workload

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