

20.11.02

16 The Deputy of St. Martin of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the level of public compliance with the guidance that face masks should be worn in all indoor public places. (OQ.295/2020)

Will the Minister provide the Assembly with his initial assessment of the level of public compliance with his department's guidance that face masks should be worn in all public places?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I thank the Deputy for his question, because our new guidance on face masks was issued last Monday, 26th October, and of course is aimed at protecting the Island from further spread of COVID. Now, I think it is quite early to assess the level of public uptake. People are adjusting, sometimes remembering their mask, sometimes not, but I think early indications are that many Islanders support this important new measure. We discussed and reviewed the guidelines with the Chamber of Commerce and the main retail supermarkets as all parts of the community have a part to play in encouraging the highest possible uptake for our safety as we go into the winter. Communicating and encouraging the use of face masks remains an important and ongoing task. We have guidance on the Government websites, posters and banners, advertising in local media channels and social media, and there has been the household leaflet drop, which I hope all Members have received as have all Islanders.

[16:00]

It includes advice on how to wear face masks and where to wear them and how important that is alongside physical distancing and hand hygiene.

4.16.1 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I thank the Minister for his answer but I cannot say that the people who have been contacting me would share the Minister's views and they regard the uptake as very poor. How long will the Minister wait before he brings the legislation to the Assembly?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am not waiting. I am anxious to lodge it and have it debated as soon as we can. It is not that the legislation itself is long. It just raises some complex issues, which are still being subject to drafting. I keep on being informed that we are near to a point where it can be lodged. There are just these minor blips that keep on cropping up that have prevented its lodging earlier. I anticipate, once lodged, we can begin to have that debate about whether it would be appropriate to make mask wearing mandatory.

4.16.2 Deputy G.J. Truscott:

Last Saturday my wife and I were out shopping at a local garden centre, and I might add we were both wearing face masks. I have got to say how disappointed I was to see so many people not wearing them, effectively ignoring strong Government advice. Could the Minister indicate what part of the law drafting is proving to be so problematical and will the Minister give the Assembly an assurance that the draft will be ready to be debated as planned in December?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It is not that anything is greatly problematical. It is simply, I understand, limits that come up on the wording and the co-ordination with other legislation from time to time. I am sorry to hear about the

Deputy's experience when shopping. I was food shopping in a local supermarket on the same day. If I was in there 10 minutes I would have estimated perhaps 50 per cent of people, 40 per cent to 50 per cent perhaps, were wearing masks. It is an ongoing educative process, but I think what is important is that more people ... well, from my limited experience more people have been wearing masks this week than on the previous week. If that trend continues, we will see more people wearing masks. I think there is a dawning understanding of the protection it can give.

4.16.3 Deputy G.J. Truscott:

I am not sure if I heard the Minister indicate that the law will be ready for debate in December, if he could confirm that, please.

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I want to lodge it ... well, I am hoping this week. I know I said that last week or a fortnight ago. It would need a 6-week lodging period unless the Assembly agrees to take it earlier. Once lodged, I would like to discuss particularly with our Scrutiny Panel, and I will also discuss with the Deputy whether he might be minded and felt others might be minded to take it earlier, perhaps on 1st December, but it will ultimately be a decision for the Assembly.

4.16.4 Deputy S.M. Ahier:

Due to the lackadaisical approach of many to the disposal of used face masks, will the Minister be providing clinical waste bins in the town centre?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

We can certainly encourage people to dispose of them properly, as the guidance does. As to whether there is a need for further bins, which would need a workforce to empty them, I do not see why people cannot use existing bins and act responsibly to dispose of their masks. I would rather ram home that message than placing more paraphernalia around our streets.

4.16.5 The Deputy of St. Martin:

Quite often in this job we get complaints from members of the public about their civil liberties being dealt with not too well, but in this case would the Minister agree with me that individual people's behaviour can have a terrible effect on other individuals, and in this case when it comes to civil liberties it is really important that we encourage and we bring the legislation to make sure that people do observe the wearing of masks in public places?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, I would agree with the Deputy. It is without doubt these have significant public health implications. It keeps people safe that we are near to and it has a degree of safety for us as we are shopping, too. It is not a great imposition just to put a covering in front of our mouth and nose for the short time we spend in shops and I, as the Government is doing, strongly recommend it.